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OR,

THE LOST DETECTIVE.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
"COOL CONRAD," "SUNSHINE SAM,"
"VOLCANO," "RICHARD REDFIRE,"
"THE COLDGRIP" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOLDIER DETECTIVES.

"You see we are almost there, captain. Red Jack lies before us. What we shall find yonder no one knows, but not much more than we have already discovered, I fear. And that is nothing."

"Right you are, Sam. I don't take much stock in playing detective with a lot of soldiers at one's back, but, I'm under orders, you know, and in the regular army orders are issued to be obeyed."

The two men who conversed thus were about to descend a mountain which they had been climbing the best part of the day. They were well mounted and apparently about the same

THE ASTONISHED TROOPERS INVOLUNTARILY DREW REIN, AND LOOKED FIRST AT THEIR CAPTAIN AND THEN AT THE DARING, DEFIANT REYNARD.

age, but their appearance and stations in life were dissimilar.

One was a captain in the United States Cavalry, though his well-worn uniform did not go far to denote his rank.

He was known as Captain Raymond, one of the bravest, shrewdest and most dashing officers of the service, an old campaigner, and a man who knew the country through which he was riding as a pilot knows his harbor.

The other was the typical army scout and guide, a well-built fellow with bronzed face and keen black eyes which seemed to lose sight of nothing as he rode along. He resembled a good many portraits that are seen nowadays of Buffalo Bill, though he had not that free and easy manner of the redoubtable Cody.

His name was Sarcy, but Solid Sam or, briefly, Sam, was the cognomen by which he was usually addressed. He had seen a great deal of service as scout and spy for Uncle Sam on the frontier, and at the time of which we write, was engaged in the line of duty.

Behind the two men rode a lot of cavalymen on somewhat jaded horses. The troopers appeared thoroughly disgusted with the expedition, and some had taken occasion to voice their disapproval.

But when they reached the summit of the mountain and saw Solid Sam point downward as he addressed the captain in the words that open this chapter, they urged their horses forward to see what was ahead.

Far away and far below the elevated trail, a number of roofs and odd-looking buildings were visible. Some of the men raised a slight cheer when they saw them, though they knew that many a rough mile lay between.

Captain Raymond smiled faintly as he replied to the scout.

"As I have said," he resumed, looking at Sarcy who carried his Winchester across the saddle, "this is a singular affair."

"Very," answered the scout.

"We have searched the country pretty thoroughly. We have been two weeks in making fifty miles, and for all our pains we have nothing but a hub-band."

"I call that nothing, captain."

"So do I, and my opinion is that Red Jack will yield us no clew."

The scout looked forward again but said nothing.

"The colonel is burning to clear up this mystery. He is as anxious as though his commission were at stake, which I think is not the case. Red Jack is quite a place now, I am told."

"It is the biggest mining-city in Dakota. It has a mixed population such as no other mining-town ever had. Some of the scum of the world is to be found there, and some very good people, too."

"I'm glad to hear your last remark, Sam," responded Captain Raymond. "I trust we won't have to deal with the scum, as you call them. I have one acquaintance in Red Jack, and I shall seek him out."

"Who is he, captain?"

"I believe he is known as Major Diamond."

"Ho! Don Diamond they call him there!" exclaimed the scout.

The cavalry captain gave a slight start of surprise.

"You seem to know him?" said he.

"As I know a good many people with whom I have come in contact," bowed Sarcy. "Your acquaintance is sometimes called the Boss of Red Jack, on account of his wealth and influence."

"We used to be friends. It was in war-times, but I have not seen him since the close of the rebellion. They tell me that he has struck it rich out here?"

"He has, in two ways," and there was a smile at the end of Sarcy's sentence.

Captain Raymond gave his companion an inquisitive glance.

"He has a very pretty daughter," explained Sam.

"A daughter?" echoed Raymond. "This is news to me. When I saw Major Diamond last, he hadn't the semblance of a family."

"But that was years ago, was it not?"

"Yes, nineteen years," answered the officer, after a moment's reflection.

"Plenty of time for one to have a daughter as pretty as Juno," laughed the scout.

"I admit that, Sam, but I can't get around the information you have just imparted. You have rendered me more than ever eager to see Don Diamond, as you all know. When will we reach Red Jack?"

"Not till midnight, at this snail's pace."

Captain Raymond turned toward the troopers at his back and gave a command which seemed to imbue them with new life.

A minute afterward the blue-coats were moving rapidly over the trail which led down the mountain, and just as the sun was about to drop behind the western horizon for the day, they rode into the camp they had seen from the summit.

Their entrance created a little excitement, for many days had elapsed since an event of the kind had occurred, and the dark-shirted, dark-faced men who watched them as they rode in

close order down the main street wondered what had brought them to Red Jack.

Solid Sam was known everywhere, and he found himself saluted by old acquaintances as he kept straight ahead, alongside of Captain Raymond, who had ordered him to guide the command to the main Square.

The troopers numbered forty-two men in all, and belonged to the Fifth Cavalry. They looked like a body of picked men, and were the flower of the regiment to which they belonged.

When they were halted in the Square, they were allowed to dismount and rest while Captain Raymond, still under Sarcy's guidance, was conducted to a large house, a great deal better than its neighbors.

"As you know Don Diamond, no introduction at my hands is necessary," remarked the scout drawing rein in front of the building. "This is the nabob's house, and I will go back. You know where to find me when I am wanted."

He touched a wide-brimmed hat with a rattle-snake band, and was saluted in turn by Raymond as he rode away.

Left alone before the house, the United States officer dismounted and approached it.

"The major didn't think of this when he was roughing it in Virginia," he laughed to himself. "When he came out of the Wilderness powder-blackened and with a dozen bullet-holes through his clothes he did not dream that he would one day be boss of a gold city like this. He won't know me probably. Ten chances to one that he has forgotten the name of Raymond."

Raymond was knocking at the door as he reflected. It was almost at once opened and the captain stared amazedly at the face that confronted him.

"Sarcy was right! As pretty as Juno!" he mentally exclaimed, and at the same time he was bowing to the young girl who was looking at him with a smile of surprise and pleasure. "Father is in," said she before Raymond could frame the proper question. "I am sure an officer of the army needs no announcement. Walk in—"

"Captain Raymond—of the Fifth Cavalry," put in the officer stepping into the house. He was conducted to a door which the young girl opened, saying as she did so:

"He is not busy. Walk in and find him at your service."

Raymond crossed the threshold of a room in which there were many shadows of the departed day. An odor of tobacco smoke pervaded the apartment which was not too dark to prevent him from seeing its occupant.

As he entered a figure moved at a table that occupied the center of the room, and the next moment he was confronted by a man of splendid physique.

"Major Diamond?" said Raymond giving at the same time the stately salute so common among regular officers.

His voice seemed a revelation, for scarcely had he spoken ere the man he addressed sprang forward.

"Carlos Raymond!" he cried.

The captain was astonished.

"I did not think it!" he said to himself. "Yet I always knew this man had a marvelous memory."

In another second the two men were shaking hands and looking at each other, and when the greeting ended Don Diamond struck a light.

Then Captain Raymond saw how handsome was the man he had encountered. He noted the large dark eyes, the full flowing mustache black and silken, the high forehead, the nut-brown skin.

"You've lost in the wild West the powder stains you got in the Wilderness?" remarked Raymond.

The other laughed.

"They were not given to last, you know," he replied. "Time has dealt kindly with you, captain. I have heard of you occasionally, but I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you here in my own house."

Raymond just then doubted whether Don Diamond was speaking the whole truth. His manner seemed a little forced as he approached the end, and when the captain replied, his brows dropped.

"I would not be here now if the stage mystery was cleared up," said he.

"Ah! does that bring you to Red Jack?" exclaimed Diamond.

"It does."

A sinister smile appeared at the corners of the gold-bug's mouth.

"It seems to me that somebody takes a mighty interest in that accident," he returned.

"Nicholas Norway was in Government employ, you must recollect, major, and was, at the time of his disappearance, on a secret mission."

"Yes, I understand that. But, is Uncle Sam going to empty his treasury and wear out his army hunting for a lost detective? Is the game worth the powder, captain?"

"I am not in a position to express an opinion."

"No. But what is the latest about the case? I presume you have beaten the bush from Fort

Meade to Red Jack. Now, what have you found?"

"The hub-band of a stage wheel."

Major Diamond fell back in his chair, and burst into a boisterous laugh that seemed to fill the whole house.

CHAPTER II.

REYNARD.

CAPTAIN RAYMOND was a little nettled by this display of merriment. For a moment it seemed that his soldierly dignity had been offended, and apprehending this Major Diamond assured him that no affront was intended.

"I cannot help laughing at the results of your trail," the Nabob of Red Jack continued. "You have scored the country between here and Fort Meade—scored it with a lot of lynx-eyed soldiers at your back, and with Solid Sam at your side; and, all you have found is the hub-band of a stage wheel! But, this is not your fault, captain; I am sure of that. You have done your duty faithfully, and your report, I trust, will open the eyes of the Government. The detective has disappeared effectually, but the trail he was on still exists. Why hasn't Uncle Sam replaced him with another man?"

"He prefers to find this lost man."

"What is the prevailing theory?—the road-agent one, eh?"

"I believe it is."

"The roadies captured the stage that carried the detective?"

"Yes."

"Granted. They come suddenly upon the team somewhere in the mountains, they drop the driver and overpower the passenger. The mountain banditti do this very often. But, here comes in the mystery: What became of the stage and its people? Six months have passed since it rolled out of Cut-throat Canyon with Whistling Dave on the box, and the Government detective inside."

"Six months exactly," added Raymond.

"We are certain Dave had but one passenger that trip."

"Only Nicholas Norway, unless—"

Captain Raymond paused abruptly, for, happening to glance out of the window at that moment, he saw the stalwart figure of a strange man.

This person stood so near the house that the light streaming through the panes revealed nearly his whole physique for a moment. Raymond had it photographed, as it were, on his mind in the space of an instant—a man in corduroy, with a dark face ornamented by a drooping mustache, and with a big sombrero-like hat with an ocean of escaping hair under the brim.

Don Diamond was lighting a fresh cigar when this apparition broke Raymond's sentence, and did not appear to notice the interruption.

"What were you saying, captain?" resumed the Don of Red Jack, throwing down the match.

"Ah, yes, you were saying that the detective was the only occupant of the ill-fated stage, unless Dave took on some one else along the route. Wasn't that it, eh?"

Raymond had not proceeded this far, but Major Diamond had taken the words out of his mouth.

"That is it," said he. "Whistling Dave sometimes took people up."

"Dangerous business, that," observed the major. "Between Cut-throat and Red Jack he had no regular stopping-place. Black Dog ceased to be a camp, five years ago. Yes," with a grin, "I think Dave did pick somebody up, but they were the banditti of the Yellow Hills. But, let us come back to your find—the hub-band. Where did you run across it?"

"About two miles south of the trail where it touches the Twin Buttes."

Major Diamond leaned toward the wall at his right, took down a map of the country of which they were speaking, and laid it on the table.

Raymond saw his finger alight on a certain spot marked Cut-throat Canyon, and then watched it run westward with numerous zig-zaggings.

"Here stand the Twin Buttes," said Don Diamond. "You found the hub-band two miles south? Why, you must have examined the ground thoroughly."

"I tried to carry out orders to the letter," answered Raymond. "I believe that mine is to be the last official hunt for the missing stage and its freight."

"Ah, do you?" ejaculated Don Diamond, looking up. "Is this official, captain?"

"I cannot say that it is. I merely draw my inferences from what I have heard."

"And you have heard it intimated that Uncle Sam is going to drop the business?"

"I have heard it intimated," was the response.

Major Diamond went back to the map.

"Somewhere within this territory," said he, drawing a quick and contracted circle with his finger, "Whistling Dave, Uncle Sam's detective, the stage and its four horses vanished from human ken. I never saw anything like it. They have disappeared as completely as if

a whirlwind had taken them into the clouds. Not only the route but the whole country has been searched. The official circulars that offer a handsome reward for information concerning the lost ferret have produced nothing. This shows, captain, that men can keep secrets. Of course you brought the hub-band to Red Jack with you?"

Raymond could not repress a smile for the alertness with which Diamond would return to the apparently insignificant find.

Twice before the disappearance of the detective, stages had been captured and burned by the road-agents. The finding of the band proved nothing. It might not have belonged to the last lost coach, but Captain Raymond had brought it to Red Jack all the same.

"I thought the band worth preserving," said he. "I understand there is a man in Red Jack who once made two new wheels for Whistling Dave's stage."

"He isn't here now," was the quick reply.

"When did he go away?"

"I am not positive when. You refer to the man named Bandolin, I presume?"

"Yes, to Bandolin, the blacksmith."

"Well, he is gone."

"I'm sorry for that," replied Raymond, with positive regret. "It was my intention to submit the hub-band to him."

"And to go back to the place where you found it and try to take the trail from there in the event of his pronouncing it a part of the missing stage?"

"No, I think I would not do that."

At this moment a figure passed the window on the outside, and Raymond caught a glimpse of a large bat with a swarthy face under it.

"One thing about the disappearance of Uncle Sam's detective is peculiar," Don Diamond went on. "Nobody seems to know what brought the man into this part of the world. He was not known as a detective until inquiries began to be made after him, and, notwithstanding the value he seems to have been to the Government, his mission has never been divulged. Where was he going? Did he intend to stop at Red Jack, or was he going on?"

To these somewhat eager inquiries, though Major Diamond tried to create an impression of nonchalance, Raymond shook his head.

"They never let me into the secret, major," he returned. "The detective was on an important mission of some kind, and the Government has considered the case of enough moment to sift it pretty well."

"Well, captain, I'm glad they've sent you among us. It gives me an opportunity to renew an old acquaintance that was enjoyable in years gone by. You find me well-fixed here. I don't bother myself about missing detectives and the like, though I confess that there is much that is enticing about this case. You saw Coral when you came in?"

Raymond's thoughts went back to the beautiful young woman who had admitted him.

"I was not aware that you had a daughter, major," he smiled.

"The only one—the sole issue of a year of happiness."

"Then, your wife is dead?"

"Yes. I went to Mexico immediately after the war. I thought I had not had enough of fighting. I found in that country my fate in black eyes and a warm love. My wife was Inez Vamero, the belle of one of the most populous districts then under Maximilian's sway. I joined the Mexicans against the French, and shortly after the expulsion, I had lost a wife and gained a daughter. Did you notice Coral's dark, rich beauty? You must have done so. She inherits it from her mother, in whose veins is some of the old hidalgo blood that has enriched Spanish-Mexico. I would call Coral in now and let you admire her in the light of my lamp; but certain sounds overhead tell me that the young lady has retired for the night. But you will see her before you turn back. Since fortune has thrown us together again, I want you to take back with you a good impression of Red Jack and its people."

Raymond said that he would be only too happy to meet the young person who had admitted him, and after a few more words during which Don Diamond expressed a wish to see the hub-band which the expedition had picked up, the cavalry captain took his departure, with a promise to meet the mountain nabob the following day.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when Major Diamond ran back to the room and jerked a cord that dangled along one of the walls.

In a moment he was confronted by a man whose face was as clean shaven as a monk's, and behind whose cheeks danced a pair of restless eyes of a steely gray.

"Ajax?"

"Well, major?"

"When did you see Bandolin last?"

"I saw him last night, betting on his favorite cards at El Paradiso."

"Last night? You are sure of this, Ajax?"

"He made me lose my last dollar; that's how I know."

Diamond seized a pen, and took a small writing-tablet from the drawer at his knees.

For a second he wrote rapidly, and when he had finished, he folded the sheet, and handed it to the man in waiting.

"Don't let any grass grow under your feet," he commanded. "Find Faverell, and deliver the letter in your hand."

Ajax bowed and departed immediately.

He rushed from the house, and made such good headway toward the Square where the soldiers were awaiting orders that he passed Captain Raymond on the way.

After a while, Raymond rejoined his command.

"Come, captain, I want to show you somebody," said the voice of Sarcy, the scout, at Raymond's ear, and at the same time his arm was partly encircled by a hand.

Captain Raymond was conducted to one side of the Square, and the scout pointed out a man who was watching a group of cavalymen with considerable interest.

"Great heavens!" cried Raymond. "I've seen him before to-night."

"Where?" inquired Sarcy.

"At Don Diamond's house. He was watching me through the window. Who is he, Sam?"

"They call him Reynard here."

CHAPTER III.

THE WARNING.

WAS it the strangeness of the name, or the appearance of the man pointed out by Sarcy, the guide, that most attracted Raymond?

The army captain looked him over from head to foot.

He was confident that he was the person he had seen on the outside of Don Diamond's window, but why had he been there?

Was he in the nabob major's employ? And was it his duty to watch all visitors with the eyes of a hawk, whether they called with good or evil intent?

"You say he was watching you through Don Diamond's window, eh?" inquired Solid Sam, when Raymond had regarded the man a while longer.

"I saw him at it."

"I guess he does that sort o' work sometimes."

"Is he in the major's service?"

The wild West scout gave Raymond a quick look.

"What makes you ask that question?" he replied.

"Isn't it natural that I should?"

"Perhaps," replied Sarcy. "If he was in Don Diamond's employ he would have been where you saw him awhile ago. But I don't think Reynard belongs in any way to Red Jack's nabob."

"Tell me about him, then."

Solid Sam took the captain's arm and the two turned away, walking slowly toward the resting troopers in the Square.

"I wanted you to see Reynard of Red Jack before you go back," resumed the scout. "He came here four months ago and is one of the permanent fixtures of the town. He is no man's slave, yet he has done some strange things since coming here. I learned what I know from those in whom I have confidence, for, as you know, I am not here much. They call him Reynard because three days after his arrival a secret theft was committed—a man got into Don Diamond's house and took something. It was a shrewd piece of work; nobody was suspected. Reynard went to work on the case and in forty-eight hours the burglar was in the sheriff's hands. They all say it was the cleverest piece of business ever seen here, and it fastened to him the name he carries now."

"Of course Major Diamond rewarded him?"

"He offered to pay him well, but Reynard pushed the money aside. Then, so it is said, he offered him the superintendency of the Bulldog Mine the biggest bonanza in the district, and this, too, was refused."

"What does Reynard do?"

"Nothing in particular, though it is suspected by some that he finally took from the major an interest in the Bulldog."

"I think I saw him on duty to-night."

"At the window?"

"Yes."

"I think the man is a secret agent, and I'm not so sure that he is not Diamond's watchdog."

"They do not think so here," answered Sarcy.

Raymond was silent for a moment.

"Do you know Reynard?" he suddenly asked.

"Slightly."

"I want to meet him to-morrow."

"You shall."

As the night was pleasant and the troopers had had a hard ride of it over the mountains, Raymond resolved to give his command some license which he knew would be enjoyed. The horses were quartered where they would have plenty of food and rest and the men were permitted to roam at will.

Raymond did not forget his mission. His in-

terview with Major Diamond had freshened his desire to fathom the mystery which shrouded the strange disappearance of Uncle Sam's detective. He could not believe that two men, a four horse team and a stage-coach could be blotted out of existence so effectively that not a single clew could be found.

Red Jack was the western terminus of Whistling Dave's run. There another line took up freight and passengers to be transferred, and carried them further on. It was not before the days of Pacific railroads, but the iron track had not yet cut the wild solitudes of the Yellow Hills.

Raymond, bent on picking up opinions, mingled with the citizens of Red Jack.

He soon discovered that he had reached camp in the midst of a boom when everybody had stocks to sell at fabulous prices to his neighbor. No one seemed to care about the lost stage and the murdered detective, and when Raymond persisted in broaching the subject in one or two groups, he was met with laughs of derision.

"Wot's a Government man-trap ter us?" drawled an unusually large man who had been offering a majority of stock in the Sally Ann at "pauper prices." "We don't keer whether he was translated like old Elijah, er whether he coaxed Whistling Dave ter emigrate. Uncle Sam's spy is an old chestnut hyer, but it clings ter ther burr like grim death."

"Who is that man?" asked Raymond.

"That is Ford Faverell."

Thereupon the big man, as if he had heard the question and answer, stepped from the counter against which he had been leaning, and stood in such a manner that his Titan physique could be seen and admired by the house.

Captain Raymond studied him a few moments and then turned away.

"I beg pardon, sir, but aren't you the captain of the soldiers who came in to-night?"

Raymond, who was stopped by these words, turned promptly on the speaker.

"I am the man," said he, and then he saw that he had been addressed by Reynard of Red Jack.

The captain's surprise was as agreeable as complete. He did not expect to meet the strange man till the following day, but here they were, face to face, and he was looking straight into the eyes he had seen looking into Don Diamond's window!

Reynard was leaning slightly against one end of the counter in the bar-room of El Paradiso, the best resort of the kind in the mountain camp, but as he addressed Raymond his figure straightened and he stepped forward.

"I've seen a good deal of the regular army, and have a liking for it," he continued. "I noticed by your men's uniforms that they belong to the Fifth Cavalry."

"To the old Fifth," responded Raymond.

"I hear—we hear so many things, you know—that you are looking for the United States detective who disappeared some six months ago somewhere between Cut-throat Canyon and Red Jack."

Raymond had not tried to conceal from anybody the real import of his mission. He had not received orders to that effect, but had been commanded to make a thorough search of the region between Cut-throat Canyon and Red Jack and to terminate his labors at the latter place.

He answered Reynard unreservedly that he had come to Red Jack in search of a clew to the mystery. He had found none, for when he said "none" he did not think it worth while to mention the hub-band which had drawn several questions from Don Diamond.

"Since you have been so open with me, I wish to say a few words, but not here," returned Reynard. "Let us walk out."

Raymond was eager to comply with this suggestion, and a few moments later they had left El Paradiso and were moving down the street.

Reynard conducted the captain to a house which stood near the northern end of the camp, and opening the door invited him to enter. When the men were inside the man of Red Jack struck a light and revealed a simply furnished interior whose one stool told that visitors formed an exception there.

"You have called on Major Diamond?" said Reynard, looking straight at Raymond.

There rose before the army captain the scene he had witnessed from the major's room.

"Yes, I have but lately left his house. We are old acquaintances."

"Ho! army friends, eh?"

"Comrades of the camp."

"But you had not seen him for years before to-night?"

"Not for nineteen years!"

"Or since the war closed, eh?"

"Not since we were mustered out."

Reynard was seen to look away, but in a moment he returned to his visitor.

"Don Diamond is up in life here as life goes," he continued. "He is what they call a bonanza prince, and his sway is almost absolute."

Reynard tried to see whether Reynard spoke with any bitterness toward Major Diamond, but failed to detect any.

"Did he give his opinion about the missing detective?"

"No positive opinion."

The captain caught the semblance of a smile at Reynard's lips.

"The major is a shrewd one!" continued the man of Red Jack. "If any man knows how to keep secrets better than he, I'd like to see him. You saw Ford Faverell at the bar, eh?"

"The big man?"

"The Ajax of the Yellow Hills."

"One could not miss a giant like him."

"Well, he is Don Diamond's man," Reynard went on. "They say here in Red Jack—but under the surface—that he carries out some mysterious orders. You would learn something if you were to tarry with us, but you will go back soon."

"Why soon?" asked Reynard, looking up into the speaker's face.

"Because you ain't safe here!"

These words accompanied by a look that emphasized them almost drove Raymond to his feet.

"I did not speak in riddles," continued Raymond with a smile. "It is unnecessary for me to repeat my words. Captain Raymond, if you value your life, and I know the bravest soldier does, you want to turn your back on Red Jack at the earliest practicable moment. Can you get away by sunrise?"

In an instant there came a flash of indignation to Raymond's face.

"You forget, Reynard of Red Jack, that I have seen four years of fighting—"

"I forget nothing," was the interruption.

"I am giving you an honest warning, and I will add that it were better that the detective should remain missing until roused by Gabriel's trumpet, than that one brave soldier should lose his life on the trail. You will go back, Captain Raymond; you will get away by sunrise. There is no clew for you in this part of the country; there is death!"

"But I can't go honorably at the hour you mention. I have an engagement with Major Diamond."

"Break it."

"It would not be soldierly."

Reynard laughed.

"This is not the camp. The war ended twenty years ago," cried he. "Besides, you owe it to the service I know you love, to act promptly on the warning I have given. Let me assure you that there is on the trail of the stage-coach mystery a Nemesis which no hand or brain shall baffle. Captain, you must go back!"

CHAPTER IV.

SOMEBODY AT WORK.

In a moment there were signs of another outburst of defiance and remonstrance in the cavalryman's eyes.

Reynard nipped it in the bud.

"We need not prolong this scene," continued he, laughing, his hand on Raymond's arm. "You have had a hard ride of it across the mountains, and will need some rest between now and sunrise. For you there is nothing but disappointment here."

He threw up one hand as Raymond was about to speak.

"Not a word, captain," he smiled. "For once take advice from Reynard of Red Jack. Uncle Sam doesn't intend that you shall play detective at the risk of your life. Leave that to others. Now let us go back."

Without another word Reynard walked out, watched curiously for a second by Raymond, and then followed by that officer.

"Good-night, captain," said Reynard, lifting his hand to his hat in semi-military style. "We will meet again some time, and under different circumstances."

Raymond was left alone after this, and several minutes elapsed before he moved a step.

His brain was full of conflicting emotions, and he found himself halting between defiance and departure.

Reynard was a mystery he could not solve.

What did he mean when he said that it would be dangerous for him to remain at Red Jack? Danger from whom?

"If I have reached the hiding-place of the men who have killed the detective, it is my duty to remain here till I have found a clew," argued Raymond. "The hub-band is nothing unless Bandolin the blacksmith could identify it, and Major Diamond says he is not in camp. On which side is Reynard? By Jove! I won't go!"

Having reached this conclusion in the face of Reynard's warning, Raymond went down among the troopers who had full possession of the Square. Here he found that Sarcy had just been there looking for him, and he started off to find the guide.

In a little while he ran against Solid Sam, who said at once:

"They've got a mysterious Masked League in Red Jack. I have just seen some of its work."

"You, Sam?" cried Raymond. "What have you witnessed?"

"Since we parted company I have been making a half circuit of the town. As I was turn-

ing this way from a certain point on the west side I heard noises that brought me to a halt. In a moment I saw figures. The moon was shining like it shines now and I had a clear field for my vision. As the noises approached, I crouched behind a boulder and waited. Presently there came into full view five mounted men. At first I thought they were five of the command, but in a short time I was undeceived. All were dressed in the rough style that prevails here and four out of the five wore masks that effectually concealed their faces. The fifth one rode in the middle with a bandage drawn tight over his mouth and with his hands lashed to his back. They passed so near my position that with but little effort on my part, I could have touched the nearest rider's boot. The moonlight fell fairly upon the prisoner's face, and my first sight of it gave me a start."

Raymond waited breathlessly for the scout to continue.

"It was Bandolin, captain," resumed Sarcy.

"Bandolin the mountain blacksmith?"

"Yes, the man who is said to have repaired the coach which is missing."

"Why, I have been told since our arrival here that he went away months ago."

A smile appeared at the corners of Sarcy's mouth.

"Well, he came back," he answered.

"Bandolin's face is well-known to me, and I don't think I could be deceived with only a few feet of moonshine between us. Bandolin sat bolt upright in the saddle, and did not look much like a man who was riding to his death, as he may have been."

"What do you think it means?" exclaimed Raymond instinctively coupling what Sarcy had seen with Reynard's warning.

"That Bandolin is to be kept out of somebody's way."

"Out of mine, eh?" cried Raymond.

"It may be."

"It must be! The man must not be confronted with the hub-band. It is not much—only a heavy circle of iron, picked up by the merest chance in the wildest country between here and Cut-throat. Bandolin would know whether it once encircled a wheel belonging to Whistling Dave's stage. Don't you see?"

"I came to this conclusion some time ago," replied Sarcy. "I was confirmed in my belief when I saw Bandolin in the clutches of the masks. I think one witness for Uncle Sam is silenced by this time."

"We can follow!" exclaimed Raymond. "My orders cover a good deal of ground, and I can use my own discretion."

"So you can."

"We can find the trail of the masks."

"And, by pushing ahead, come up with the Dakota blacksmith dangling from some lyncher's limb. It is evident that there is a controlling spirit back of this."

"Of course," assented the scout. "In all these wild gold-towns there is an unseen power behind the throne. The hand of that power has just throttled Bandolin. We don't know what the next move will be. With the blacksmith out of the way, your hub-band is useless. It loses as a relic the interest it would have possessed as a part of the missing stage. Are you sure you have it still?"

Raymond started at the question.

"I'm not sure of anything, any more. The band was left among the personal effects attached to my saddle. Let us investigate."

The two men went back to the men on the Square, Raymond leading the way direct to his horse.

"Has anybody strange been here, Mahone?" he asked a soldier who stood near, as he placed his hand on a roll strapped securely to the saddle.

"No, sir!" was the prompt and emphatic answer.

The following moment Raymond loosened the straps, and thrust one hand with eagerness into the bundle.

"It is gone, sir!" he smiled, looking at Sarcy, who met the words with a nod. "By Jove! we have struck a nest of conspirators. They take a witness away under masked guard, and steal that which might prove dangerous evidence of another kind. They want me to go away," he added, leaning toward Sarcy, his eyes dancing with excitement and the words coming out through his teeth. "They advise me that I will not be safe here to-morrow after sunrise. We have reached the proper field for operations. There are men in Red Jack who can solve the mystery of the missing Government agent. We have just discovered some of their play. The sun will find me here when it comes up to-morrow. Your contract with us expired the moment we rode into Red Jack. Uncle Sam has no claim on you at this time, and I am not empowered to enter into another contract with you."

Solid Sam looked at Raymond a moment without speaking.

"You say you have been warned to depart at or before sunrise, eh?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who delivered the warning?"

"Reynard."

A sudden change came to Sarcy's countenance.

"What was your answer, captain?"

"I made none. The interview was brought to a close in a manner that shut out my decision."

"What was Reynard's manner?"

"He appeared uneasy at the thought that I might remain here some time. He did not relish the thought of having me here at this time."

"Yet, he made no explanations?"

"He offered none beyond the vague remark that my life would not be safe in Red Jack after sunrise."

The king of Dakota scouts looked at the rifled pack on the saddle.

"Don't you link the warning to that piece of business?" asked Raymond, intercepting the glance.

Sarcy replied, cautiously:

"I'm not prepared to say, captain."

"I do!" cried Raymond, boldly, at the same time flushing with indignation. "I don't intend to lose my head in anything I do, but my blood boils when I think of the mean theft proclaimed by the silent witness yonder. The trouble is the hunters who have preceded us never went far enough. They stopped short of Red Jack, or else they made no effort while here. Now, I have a starting-point. The hand that sent Bandolin away under guard had the hub-band stolen."

"But whose band, captain?" inquired Sarcy.

There was a name on Raymond's tongue which he did not speak.

"The future will answer you, Sarcy," said he.

"My Government wants the men who have robbed it of Nick Norway—one of its best detectives. I am now the dog on the trail, and because I have reached the ground and find the conspirators at work, I am not to be driven off!"

Solid Sam said nothing in reply. He knew the man who had just spoken, and was aware that when aroused and set in a purpose he would go to the end if he knew his life would pay for his daring.

"I shall send a picked body after Bandolin," Raymond continued. "The men will get off before daybreak. I will play my personal hand here. I know you will shake your head at something I do, Sam, but I am determined to follow the clew I think I have found."

"If the unknown power here turns on you—"

"I don't call it unknown," interrupted Raymond. "I think I could place my finger on the controlling spirit of Red Jack. You seem to forget, Sarcy, that I have lately come from Don Diamond's."

"I have not forgotten, but do you associate the nabob's name with either of the events we have conversed about?"

"The man is cool, shrewd and powerful," was the answer. "He rules here almost as absolutely as does the Czar in St. Petersburg. The Bull Dog Mine is rich enough to make him a Croesus ten times over. But, he has other mines almost as valuable. He received me with the cordiality of an old comrade, but I saw something in his eye—I noticed several changes of countenance which tell me that Major Diamond has a past which he would conceal, and that he is living a double life which he intends to defend."

"And Reynard? what of him?"

"Oh, I haven't fully made up my mind," returned Raymond with a light laugh. "But, I am settled in my opinion of another Red Jack gentleman."

"And he is—"

"Ford Faverell, the Titan. He is the executant of Don Diamond's orders."

"You are right. That is the very name he bears here."

"Then, I'll give him some of my attention," observed Raymond as he walked off.

He walked past Major Diamond's house.

It was dark and silent.

If he could have entered he would have seen two men seated at a table on which stood a pair of wine bottles and some glasses.

Between them on the cloth lay an object which looked out of place there.

It was a roughly fashioned iron ring, heavy enough to be the hub-band of a strong wheel. If Raymond could have seen it there, his eyes would have snapped.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOLDIER-HATER.

ABOUT this time a horse was coming down the mountain over a trail which was directly opposite the one used by the soldiers.

Every now and then sparks of fire struck from the stones played around his hoofs for the trail in some places was rough, but the rider who was a young man and handsome kept his seat with the ease and grace of an old equestrian.

There was just enough wind to lift the front of his hat with its ample brim, and to keep open the loose jacket like coat that he wore.

His destination was undoubtedly Red Jack which was the nearest settlement of any kind,

for when he reached a turn in the road and saw two hands on a huge flat stone with "Rattlesnake City" under one and "Red Jack" beneath the other, he kept on toward the last named camp.

After awhile he left the roughness of the mountain behind, and found himself among the cabins of Red Jack.

At the edge of the square he drew rein and looked forward over his steed's sharp ears.

"Soldiers!" cried he. "I wonder what this means? There were none here when I went away and none were expected. There must be fifty. Well, whatever brought them, there will be some people here who won't try to make their stay agreeable."

He rode on, crossing the Square to where, beyond a low porch, he saw lights and the figures of men.

"Hello! Back once more, Darrell?" was the greeting he received from a man who leaned against one of the unplanned pillars of the veranda, and took a pipe from his mouth.

"Yes, I have just come in. What means all that out yonder?"

"Soldiers," replied the Red Jack citizen tartly, and in no good humor, as was apparent by his manner.

"I saw they were troopers," returned the young man. "But why are they here? That's what I want to know."

"The old mystery that seems ter be disturbin' Uncle Sam's sleep. I'd like ter know what makes that infernal old stage so valuable. It didn't have diamond spokes set in gold hubs, I reckon."

A new light seemed to break in upon the youth called Darrell.

"I thought the Government had given the matter up," said he.

"Doesn't look that way out there, eh?" laughed the smoker motioning toward the bivouac on the Square.

"When did they come?"

"About dark."

"Who is their leader?"

"A man named Raymond, captain, I think. They've been beatin' the brush everywhar 'twixt n'yar an' Cut-throat. Solid Sam did the guidin' business."

"Is he here now?"

"Yes."

The young man turned toward the Square again and studied the dark figures there a few moments.

The presence of the cavalymen seemed distasteful to him. He had not expected to be greeted by a scene of the kind, and the abruptness of the meeting had taken him aback.

"Do you know when they are going back, Blondin?" he suddenly asked.

"No. I haven't asked the captain."

There was manifest irritation in the speaker's tones, and Darrell looked at him a moment half perplexed and resentful.

"No, and I wouldn't ask the captain to save your neck, either," growled Blondin under his breath, watching the youth who crossed the porch to look into the open door of the bar-room just beyond. "You didn't have ter come back ter Red Jack, for we kin get along without you! The military kind o' struck you hard, eh? Warr'n't lookin' for anythin' of the kind. Neither war we," and Blondin threw a look toward the Square and continued to smoke in silence.

The young man did not enter the room, which was pretty well filled with here and there a blue-coat, but turned away after a glance and passed Blondin to the horse he had left near the porch.

Grasping the rein, he led the animal away and soon disappeared.

In a short time he turned up in a small house some distance from the soldier-occupied Square.

When he had struck a light he went to a cot which occupied one corner of the room, and thrust one hand under the bedding.

A moment later he drew forth several bits of paper which he opened and read one after the other at the table.

"Nothing about the soldiers," he exclaimed, looking up from the last note, all of which were written in pencil in the unmistakable chirography of a member of the gentler sex. "I forget that they came in since sundown. On the old trail, Blondin says. Six months have passed, and here the Government is still looking for the stage-coach. I wonder what the detective's mission was? but I've been doing this ever since."

He laughed to himself, and put the slips of paper in his pocket.

"It is too late to see her to-night," he continued, a second later. "I shall not have that pleasure before to-morrow. I can go out and take a look at this Captain Raymond for I'm anxious to see what sort of a man Uncle Sam has sent after his lost investigator."

The light was lowered in the cabin and Darrell, who had laid aside the pistols he had worn during his ride, went out.

Curious to see the leader of the troopers, he bent his footsteps toward the Square.

Some of the men had spread their blankets on the ground and had arranged their saddles for pillows. Others had fallen asleep as if wooed by the beauty of the night and the at-

mosphere redolent with fresh orders from the mountains.

Darrell, the youth, walked straight into the bivouac.

"I may be going too far," suddenly cried he. "The camp of the soldier is no place for curious civilians. But they have no guard out, and I can go back as quietly as I came when I wish to."

The next minute he was aware that he was seen.

A few feet away leaning against a horse and so close that horse and man were barely distinguishable, was a figure not clad in uniform.

Darrell saw the man by the merest accident, and thinking that he had found some one on whom he could press a few inquiries, he went boldly forward.

All at once the stranger moved, and before the youth could fairly notice him he had entirely vanished.

Darrell stopped short in his tracks.

"That's a queer move," thought he. "I don't think the man was a soldier. If not, what was he doing here?"

It struck Darrell that the other side of the horse might afford him another glimpse of the vanished man, but it did not, and he heard no footsteps that indicated flight.

Unable to reach a solution of this little mystery the young man turned back, and walked toward a group of soldiers whose talk and laughter were unguarded.

As he drew near he caught sight of a figure lying full length on the ground. It was not far from the soldiers, and Darrell at first mistook it for a cavalryman.

He still approached the soldiers, but suddenly halted for the apparently sleeping trooper was wriggling away, as if he wanted to escape without being seen.

In an instant, it flashed through Darrell's mind that he had again encountered the man he had just seen dodge out of sight around the horse.

His first impulse was to spring forward and close with the fellow, who was doubtless a camp vagabond among the soldiers for no good, but fear of discovering a stranger held him back.

Darrell continued to watch the rolling figure till it had rolled itself beyond reach, when he gave up the task.

He stood aloof awhile and watched the soldiers who reclined on the ground and were making merry with army jokes.

"Hush! the captain!" exclaimed one throwing up his hand.

Darrell at the same moment caught sight of an approaching figure, and as the merriment became hushed he saw an officer join the group.

It was to obtain a glimpse of the leader of the soldiers that Darrell had invaded the bivouac, and now that he had been successful he leaned forward burning with curiosity.

The full round moon which hung in the sky like an oval shield of burnished silver showed the youth the soldier figure of the army detective. It did not reveal his face as well as could be desired, but the keen eyes of the young man saw enough to convince him that the mystery hunters were well led.

It happened that Darrell was in shadow, but, as he had not entered the camp on the Square for the purpose of playing spy, he decided to withdraw.

This he could do with some satisfaction, for he had seen Captain Raymond, but he was not so sure that he could get back unseen.

He might have heard the words that were passing between Raymond and his men, but Darrell refused to play eavesdropper.

Gliding back, he managed to get beyond the boundaries of discovery, and, as he was quitting the Square, he heard a footstep and then a voice.

"When did you come in?"

The young man had to turn to see the speaker, and as he did so a stride on the man's part brought them close together and face to face.

"Ah! my spy of a few moments ago!" mentally exclaimed Darrell as he took in the personnel of his confronter from head to foot.

"I came in a short time since," Darrell answered.

The man who was a few years his senior, slender and wiry, with a quick, restless glance, looked toward the soldiers.

"What do you think of them?" he asked.

There were hate and anger in his tones, and his eyes seemed to ignite.

"I haven't been here long enough to pass an opinion," responded Darrell. "They tell me that they're looking for the lost stage."

"The blue-coated fools!" growled the lithe tough. "They've ridden over the mountains to their death. Do you hear that, Darrell? I say, they've come to a trap, of their own setting. I don't care partick'lar what fetched 'em. There won't be one o' them see Fort Meade ag'in!"

The youth looked at the speaker in a maze.

"What use have we for an army when Uncle Sam turns it into a pack o' bloodhounds?" he went on. "Ar' we a set o' murderers that Red Jack must be invaded like this? I'm glad you're back, Darrell. You can't hate soldiers as I do, because you never suffered at their hands. I could go out there and shoot 'em all dead in

their tracks. But their doom is sealed. There won't be one o' them get back to the fort. They're just as good as dead men now. Ha, ha! then Uncle Sam will have a sensation on his hands."

It was a cold, devilish laugh that grated harshly on Darrell's ears, and he saw the man walk off with his hands tearing away at invisible throats.

CHAPTER VI.

FORD FAVERELL'S PLAY.

THERE was no better known man among the Yellow Hills than Tough Talbot, the soldier-hater.

The mere mention of a soldier was sufficient to excite him, but the sight of a blue-coat was sure to throw him into a perfect frenzy of rage.

He accused the army of murdering a brother, when in truth the brother was a repeated deserter who had been caught at last and shot according to military law.

It did not require much imagination to believe that Tough Talbot's hands were already stained with the blood of more than one unfortunate soldier-guard of the wild frontier. He carried his vindictiveness to extremes, and was always ready to plot against the army or against any person even remotely connected with it.

His threats and prophecies sent a chill of horror to Darrell's heart.

Could it be that the little command was to be enticed into some ambush and mercilessly butchered?

He knew that Talbot was none too good to plan such a piece of villainy, but he could not carry it through unaided.

The young man after watching the soldier-hater disappear, looked toward the bivouac where all had become quiet. The fires at which the men had cooked their coffee had been put out, and it seemed as though the whole camp had dropped suddenly into deep slumber.

"If Talbot told the truth the butchery must be prevented," he said to himself. "Fifty brave men must not be slaughtered like sheep in the shambles because they are obeying orders, or because one man hates them. If there is a conspiracy afoot, they shall be put on their guard. As for Tough Talbot, he cannot carry out his insane wishes alone. Who backs him? That's what I want to know."

Darrell did not follow Talbot, but walked toward El Paradiso.

Beyond the open door were a score of burly figures, and as he stepped upon the low porch one separated from the rest and came out.

Darrell stopped instantly.

"Ho! I heard you were in camp!" exclaimed a gruff voice, as he was observed by the speaker.

In a second the youth was confronted by Ford Faverell, the Titan of Red Jack, and before he could reply, the man went on:

"Come with me. I want to have a minute with you."

"I'm at your service. Which way?"

The giant led Darrell down the street and threw open the door of one of the cabins.

As they entered, Darrell heard a singular noise, and glancing at the top of the door saw that an iron bolt had fallen, thus locking the portal effectively.

Faverell eyed the young man after the manner of the hawk that finds the captured mouse securely in its claws.

Physically the men were not equally matched. Darrell was well muscled, active and strong, but for all his advantage he could not cope with the crusher of the Yellow Hills.

After a few moments of silence Ford Faverell leaned suddenly toward his companion. There was but the corner of a rough table between them.

"I think we'd better come to an understanding first as last," began the giant.

Young Darrell looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"Don't know what I mean, eh?" laughed Faverell. "I'm talking about Coral."

Darrell fell back as though the head of a rattlesnake had darted across the table at him.

"I see you know now," continued the big tough. "I've got the call on you, boy, and there's no use keeping it a secret. The major and I thoroughly understand one another, and Miss Coral is not going to oppose the decrees of fate. In other words, as you may not comprehend the situation, from this night the girl is the betrothed of Ford Faverell, Esquire, the Titan of Red Jack."

The speaker seemed to take fiendish delight in spreading this bit of important information before Darrell, and he could see by the color which came and went that the youth had received a thunderbolt.

For a moment Darrell looked at his torturer in blank amazement, then as the full meaning of the words seemed to burst upon him, he flushed to the temples with indignation.

"Is this the news you wanted to impart?" he asked. "Was I brought to this cabin to be told this and nothing more?"

"That's about it," answered Faverell with another smile for he saw the gaping wound he had inflicted.

"Then, I'll go back," resumed Darrell.

The young man was trying to keep back an explosion of wrath and denunciation. His better nature was saying to him. "Not here, not now," and he was fearful that he could not control himself unless he got away from the man before him.

"Sit down!" commanded Ford Faverell as Darrell rose and sent a swift glance toward the door.

The youth did not obey, but looked at Faverell, for the first time showing defiance in his mien.

"Very well," cried the giant. "Take it standing, then. You don't want to object to the proceedings I have just mentioned. The matter is settled, and you know that the commands of Don Diamond are as unalterable as the acts of the Medes and Persians."

"Why keep me here?" asked Darrell. "I have been fully informed as to the agreement which needs no comment. Why have I been singled out in this manner?"

"Great Scott! why?" almost roared the Titan of Red Jack, and he colored till his face grew purple. "I guess the camp's got eyes. I guess we know a few things, and if we haven't noticed how affairs were going between you and the girl we need a lunatic asylum in the Hills. That's what I say openly, young man. You want to play the discreet gentleman in this matter. It'll be to your advantage to do so. In the next place I'm Coral's equal in expectations for I am now half partner in the Bull Dog and Red Horse, either of which partnerships makes me next to Don Diamond himself the richest man in Dakota."

"I am not particularly interested in your financial affairs," responded Darrell, looking the boastful giant squarely in the face.

"I don't know that you should be," was the retort. "But I just mentioned the matter to show you that Coral is contracting no pauper alliance. Her future husband can go back seven generations in his ancestry. There are people in Red Jack who can't match him there."

In a flash, with fire in his eyes and blood in his cheeks, Darrell covered the distance between him and the Samson of Red Jack.

"Don't taunt me about my birth!" cried he, throwing up his hand. "It is not my fault that I am a waif on the sea of life. I am not to be blamed because I cannot tell you about my father, nor because I never remember having heard of the woman who gave me birth. Yet, for all this, I am proud of the blood which gives me life—as proud as he is of his who can go back seven generations."

This cut direct made the giant's lips twitch.

"That's all right in your mind; but I know, and you don't. That's the difference," said Faverell. "It had its effect when the agreement was made. A young woman on the lookout for a husband weighs these things carefully."

"When did you secure a half-interest in the mines?" inquired Darrell.

"To-night. Do you want to see a copy of the agreement?"

"No," answered the youth, with a gesture, as Faverell was putting a hand beneath his jacket.

"You see I own, now," continued the giant. "I am dependent on no one. It is 'Diamond and Faverell,' and woe to the man or men who lifts a hand against the firm, individually or collectively! You don't wish us success, if I read your eyes aright."

"I can do that. I can wish the firm all the success it deserves, and if the wish is desired on your part, you have it in full."

Darrell stepped to the door.

Instead of laying his hand on the latch, as Faverell seemed to think he would, he reached up and caught a dangling cord which operated the drop-bolt above the door.

"When are you going away?" asked Faverell.

The young man turned in an instant.

"Who said I was going?"

"No one in particular, but I thought you wouldn't care about staying here after what has happened."

A smile came to Darrell's lips and sparkled in his eyes.

"You mistake your man, Captain Faverell," exclaimed he. "I am not to be driven off by the kind of revelations you take pleasure in spreading. You forget that I am as much a citizen of Red Jack as is the man who want me away. I shall take care of myself; don't let my welfare bother you. But it seems to agitate you as much as the presence of the soldiers irritates some of our people."

"To the deuce with the soldiers!" cried Faverell. "Uncle Sam may find this tracking business expensive in more ways than one. You've heard, of course, what brings them here?"

"The lost stage and its freight," said Darrell.

"Yes, the old mystery—the fool-hunt which should have ended six months ago. Red Jack is getting tired of it. Don't we know that a certain army captain who wrote up the mystery for the Eastern papers said that some day a clew would be found here, thus implying that the blood of the detective is on our hands?"

Now come the soldier ferrets from Fort Meade. Some of them have said that they intend to remain here till they get a clew, and their captain is sanguine of hanging at least a dozen of us. That's the situation in a nutshell, and Red Jack is expected to swallow the insult without wincing. I don't know what will be the next step, but I shouldn't wonder if the soldiers would breathe freer if they were in Fort Meade and not here."

"The Government is behind them," suggested Darrell.

"Yes, but they have become suspects of their own race, and hunters of their fellow-men. And all because six months ago a man disappeared—a man who may be mining somewhere in California or the South. Dead is he? Why, Uncle Sam hasn't put forward a particle of proof to show that Nicholas Norway was killed. But out yonder are a lot of soldiers who'd like to march all Red Jack over the mountains to execution. Is it a wonder we hate the blue-coats? We're all getting against them like Tough Talbot is. They'd better break camp."

Darrell left the big man alone with his ire.

He opened the door and walked out, glancing back through the window as he cleared the cabin, to see Faverell's face there with his eyes watching him like a fox's.

"So they have thrown themselves between us," the young man murmured. "He had to taunt me about the unfortunate mystery of my life. I won't forget that. As to the soldiers, they must be warned. I see now that Talbot did not lie."

Just then, as Darrell looked toward the cabin, he saw a man move toward him. As the figure approached, he noticed that, instead of being the giant's, it belonged to Reynard, of Red Jack.

CHAPTER VII. A COURT OF THREE.

It was now clear to Darrell that Tough Talbot's threats against the soldiers were not idle ones.

Ford Faverell in his way had invested them with a startling confirmation which left no room for doubts.

The young man knew the desperadoes of Red Jack well enough to fear for the safety of the little command bivouacked on the Square.

The country between Red Jack and Fort Meade afforded excellent places for ambush, and in nearly all of them a company of cavalry could be slaughtered to a man.

Perhaps the soldiers had talked too much; perhaps Captain Raymond had been a little unguarded in the expression of his opinions. At any rate, there was a deep, dark conspiracy afoot and if the troopers were not warned they would be the sufferers.

A thousand projects seemed to rise in Darrell's thoughts as he walked back to his cabin to compose his mind.

He even forgot the insults Faverell had heaped on him; he overlooked the victory the Titan had won with Coral as the prize. He wanted to save the soldiers.

Of course Captain Raymond would require something definite to convince him that treachery was intended. Darrell as yet had nothing but Tough Talbot's outbursts of rage and Faverell's vaporings.

He wanted something more substantial.

"I can go to Bandolin," suddenly thought the youth in his perplexity. "We are friends and Bandolin never trained with treason. He has been here all the time, and he is one of those who keep eyes and ears open. Yes, I go to the Dakota blacksmith."

Reaching this solution of the dilemma, Darrell lost no time between his own shanty and Bandolin, but the blacksmith was not at home.

Then he visited the haunts frequented by the man, but with the same result—no Bandolin.

If he had witnessed the sight seen by Sarcy the scout, he would not have put himself to this trouble.

He did not dream that Bandolin had left Red Jack under guard, and with his hands tied on his back.

"Can't I succeed?" he exclaimed, with the last bush well beaten. "Next to Bandolin, whom can I trust? Ah! it would have been Coral an hour ago! Now—"

He broke his own sentence.

If Coral had entered into the agreement made by Don Diamond and Faverell, dare he go to her?

He was more perplexed than ever.

For ten minutes he stood before Major Diamond's house like a person who hopes against hope that the prison door will open to let out a friend.

Beyond the shutters of one of the lower windows gleamed a ray of light that possessed a thrill for Darrell.

He approached it almost unconsciously.

Never before had he played eavesdropper, and he did not want to begin now.

"What if I can hear something confirmatory of this conspiracy?" he asked himself. "It will be all the risk is worth, and I can afford to risk something to save fifty brave men."

In a moment Darrell was leaning against the shutter and his eyes were close to the slats.

At first he saw nothing, but gradually the interior of a room became revealed, and then the figures of three men. They were all known to Darrell, and in a little while the trio at the table were recognized as Faverell, Don Diamond and Tough Talbot.

The grouping of the three at that time and place meant mischief. It was indicative of a conspiracy dark and damnable.

"Which of the three places shall it be?" asked Major Diamond, looking at his companions.

"Name it yourself. We stand ready to obey," replied Talbot. "You know the men of Red Jack. They will not leave one blue-coat to tell the tale."

Don Diamond turned to the table partly covered with a map, and Darrell saw his finger mover across the surface.

"I would name Vulture Gulch but—"

"Vulture Gulch it is!" interrupted Talbot. "I would have named the place myself. It will take a little stratagem to decoy the birds into the trap, but we will get them there. They don't know me well enough to suspicion anything. I will set them on the trail. If necessary I will guide them myself."

Don Diamond stepped back from the table.

"What did the young fellow say?" he asked, looking at Faverell. "You said that you met him awhile ago."

"It hit him like a thunderbolt. He cringed when I mentioned his ancestry, and it did me good to see him pocket the innuendo. He won't be very dangerous here. The cards are at our command. We deal them after our own style and play. Of course we win."

"Especially when we have a mob of picayune soldiers to play against!" hissed Tough Talbot, his blood mounting to his temples and deeply crimsoning them. "We must get them off tomorrow."

"The captain may not want to go."

"I'll fix that!" exclaimed Talbot. "I'll work to perfection a little scheme that will settle the matter. If they start, say by noon, they can reach Vulture Gulch by night."

"By nine o'clock."

"And the moon, up before that time, will help them over the trail."

"Just so."

"I'd like to have the pleasure of seeing the blue birds tumble from their perches by day; but if the major says otherwise, I acquiesce."

"The moon will be directly over the spot," continued Don Diamond, seriously. "There will be light enough to enable us to make Vulture Gulch one of the most memorable spots in Dakota. Ah! these hated blue-clad bloodhounds! I would sweep them from the face of the earth totally and without mercy."

"And I would lock on the last shrieking soul the burning gates of Tartarus!" cried the soldier-hater.

The young man at the window outside felt his blood creep cold at these words. There was now no doubt of the massacre threatened by Tough Talbot in a moment of passion!

The soldiers were to be decoyed to a spot which nature seemed to have intended for a death-trap, and there butchered to a man. He had no desire to hear any more for he had heard enough.

"Captain Raymond must saddle at once!" cried he. "The sun must not see him in Red Jack. By dint of good riding, watchfulness, and keeping to the old trail, all may escape. The soldiers must be content to let the mystery of the Lost Detective remain unsolved. Fifty lives are worth more than the discovery of a secret. Time draws the curtain from before the hidden crime. I am going to save these men."

He looked once more into the house, but Ford Faverell had disappeared. He searched the room with his eyes, but the giant of Red Jack was nowhere to be seen.

"Here! Spy!" suddenly cried a voice behind him.

The words went through Darrell's brain like flying arrows.

It seemed to him that he would fall, but as he turned, with a hand moving quickly toward his weapons, a figure sprang at him over some low shrubbery, and he was jammed against the house with a fury that threatened to break every bone in his body.

This startling change in Darrell's fortunes did not occupy five seconds.

"I guess I've named you well!" continued the man who held the youth. "I thought you would play a sneaking hand when I noticed how you received the information I imparted awhile ago. I saw you through the pane by the merest accident, but I didn't exactly know whom I was catching till you turned at my voice."

Long before the last sentence Darrell had recognized his assailant, and it was by no means consoling to know that he had fallen into the clutches of Ford Faverell.

"Let Major Diamond have a chance to look at Red Jack's only spy," the Titan went on.

Darrell drew back, but the clutch at his arm tightened, and he was walked to the door and then up the steps.

But for several things which could not have been duplicated beyond the pale of reality, the whole affair would have seemed a horrible dream.

Darrell could not break away, and even if he could have done so, where would he have found a refuge?

In a little while he was under the nabob's roof.

Faverell, with the triumph of a tiger in the depths of his eyes, escorted him down the front corridor and opened a door.

The room beyond was well lighted, and Darrell saw the wondering gaze which two men fixed on him as he was marched across the threshold.

"I found a spy at the window," explained the Ajax of the camp, releasing Darrell suddenly before Don Diamond. "He has overheard all that has lately passed in this room. You recollect what I told you about his conduct, a while ago?"

There was no reply.

Don Diamond and the youth stood face to face, the one stern of countenance, the other firm and pale.

"Is this true?" suddenly asked the Croesus. "You were at the window?"

What could he say?

Faverell had caught him in the very act of playing spy. A lie would do him no good, and Darrell resolved that a lie should not be told.

"I was there," he replied.

"Listening?"

"Listening."

Diamond looked astonished.

"How were you going to use the information you were getting?"

"I do not have to answer that question."

"I'll answer it," cried Talbot. "He was going to impart it to the blue bloodhounds. The man who listens is always the enemy of those whom he overhears."

Major Diamond silenced the blusterer with a look.

"You will not tell us how you were going to use your discovery. You were going to see the army-captain?" said he to Darrell.

"I have not said so."

"No, but that was in his head all the time," broke out the soldier-hater.

"Well, you have heard that which will hold you a prisoner for a time," Major Diamond went on.

Darrell made no reply.

"Tie him!"

"Me, major?" ejaculated Talbot springing toward the youth who colored when he was touched by the soldier-killer.

"Yes, if you want the job, Talbot," smiled Diamond.

It did not take long for the swift fingers of Talbot to lash Darrell's hands on his back.

"Now the cover," spoke the nabob again.

Before he knew what was meant, something silken dropped over his eyes from above and all became instantly dark.

"We want no spies, no traitors in Red Jack!" remarked Diamond. "This is the only court before which you will ever appear. You have been convicted on your own testimony, and the drama in which you were just appearing will be played through without you."

"And in blood, too!" added Talbot.

"Silence!" commanded the boss of Red Jack. "Now, take the prisoner away!" And a hand, it must have been Faverell's, so large it was, closed on doomed Darrell's arm.

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK WORK.

BUT for these startling events, Captain Raymond would have had a visitor in the camp yet that night.

He would have heard from Darrell's lips a thrilling story of conspiracy and proposed ambush, but the unexpected seizure under the window had interfered.

The troopers were astir at daybreak and breakfast fires were soon alight.

Raymond had made up his mind to follow up certain theories he had mentally established.

The theft of the hub-band, and the conduct from Red Jack of Bandolin under guard, told him that he had invaded the territory of some one who knew something about the missing detective and the lost stage.

He was aware that Sarcy, the guide, having fulfilled his contract had already departed, going west on a mission not connected with his own, and that he was left in Red Jack with no one with whom he could consult.

Reynard's warning had not been forgotten, but the strange man's eagerness had rendered Raymond suspicious.

"Captain Raymond, is it?" asked a man who appeared rather suddenly in the officer's path as he was about to turn toward the northern suburbs of Red Jack, where the paying mines were.

Raymond answered in the affirmative and then looked at the questioner.

He saw a typical miner, whose grimy face and hands proclaimed his calling. To Raymond at first sight all miners were alike.

"I'd like to see you sir, privately, before we

go to work," continued the man. "Were you going toward the Bulldog?"

"Is it in that direction?" asked the captain pointing away.

The man nodded.

In another minute the two were walking on side by side.

The miner said his name was Cadron, that he had been twelve years among the Yellow Hills, that he knew everybody, and every spot of ground in the territory, and hinted that he had some valuable information in store for the proper party.

He kept up a perfect flow of talk till they reached the almost concealed mouth of a mine.

"This is an annex to the famous Bulldog," he explained ushering Raymond into the gloomy place. "We took two hundred thousand out of here before it failed; the Bulldog is perfectly inexhaustible."

Raymond was conducted down several vaulted corridors which told the story of arduous mining until at last a vaulted chamber was reached.

"We can talk here," remarked Cadron putting down the light he carried and leaning against one of the walls. "I think I have some information for you. You have been sent here by the Government to find a clue to the fate of the lost detective, Nicholas Norway."

"That is my mission," replied Raymond. "I thought it was pretty well understood here."

"So it is, but I wanted confirmation from your own lips—that was all. Those who have preceded you on this trail have found nothing, because they have not hunted where the clue lies. It is not in Red Jack, captain."

A thrill pervaded the officer's frame.

"It is where the spies before you have not looked. It is worth my life to tell you even this, for the secret which has baffled Uncle Sam's men is guarded closely, and the man who breathes betrayal places in jeopardy his very existence."

Cadron had lowered his voice and his countenance had undergone a change calculated to impress the most incredulous with the truth of his story.

"You are not going to take Sarcy back with you?" he went on.

"No. He has gone away on a mission with which we have nothing to do."

"He is the best scout in the West to-day, yet he has not thought of the hunting-ground which can be made to yield the most satisfactory results. When can you depart with your command?"

"At once, if I think it worth while."

The miner stepped forward and took from beneath his jacket a piece of paper which he handed to Raymond.

"What is this?" asked the soldier.

"Open it and see."

Raymond obeyed and found a roughly-drawn diagram which he examined a few moments and then looked up into Cadron's face, still puzzled.

"That is the route to the clue you're looking for," answered the miner.

"The clue?"

"Yes. That diagram can lead a man of good judgment to a certain clue to the Norway mystery. You see the black cross yonder?"

"I see it."

"That is Vulture Gulch. Is the name new to you, captain?"

"No. I have noticed it on the surveys."

"Aha! on the surveys of ten years ago when it had no secrets, though it wasn't a desirable place. Well, sir, it stands ready to give you a start. You will see that it does not lie on the trail over which you led your command. It is situated beyond the limits of your exploration. No one has thought of looking there for a clue. I do not wonder at it either, yet Vulture Gulch holds in its grip the very thing a man of your energy wants."

Raymond showed his interest and eagerness in the look he had fastened on the miner.

"I can tell you this who would tell no one else," continued Cadron. "I know that Uncle Sam's soldiers are gentlemen who keep secrets inviolate. Then, I am going away. I'm tired of slavery here where only a few get rich and the many stay poor. Vulture Gulch contains a number of dark cracks in its walls. These openings are, in reality, the entrances to caverns which, in many instances, connect with each other like the rooms of a house. You enter the Gulch from the west. Nearly half-way down the trail leading through it you reach a mass of rock which seems to have fallen from the wall above at some time. In passing around the rocks you find one of the openings I have mentioned. It is large enough to admit of the entrance of a man on horseback, and the cavern beyond would hold a regiment of cavalry."

"This is what the Indians call Manitou's Mouth. Now, Captain Raymond, the clue you want is at your command."

The soldier waited for Cadron to proceed, but he folded his arms and remained silent.

"Do you tell me that I shall find the lost trail in Manitou's Mouth?" demanded Raymond.

"I have not said so, but I think I have not been talking riddles," was the response. "If I mistake not, more than one unvisited spot in

the Yellow Hills holds some dark secret, but Manitou's Mouth caps the climax with the one in its grip. I don't say what is there. Remember, that I accuse nobody, that I say nothing about how the Gulch came to possess its secret. It is for a brave, shrewd man like yourself to find that out. I am content to leave the rest with you; but I will say that for a man like Captain Carlos Raymond, Manitou's Mouth will tell enough."

"When could one reach Vulture Gulch?" queried the army captain with impatience.

"It would be well to reach it at night," suggested Cadron. "The cavern can be explored then as well as by day for at any time artificial light must show the way. You don't have to give out before starting that you are going direct to the Gulch. You start for Fort Meade with your command, you have discovered nothing, and furthermore you believe that Uncle Sam is wasting time and wearing out the army trying to unravel one of the impenetrable mysteries of the West, or something of this sort. Red Jack will understand that you are going back over the mountain; and Vulture Gulch need not be so much as hinted at."

"But why this secrecy?" exclaimed Raymond. "What has Red Jack to do with an expedition to Manitou's Mouth?"

"Remember, I accuse no one," responded Cadron. "The men of Red Jack have been my partners for years. My hand was not in the disappearance of Uncle Sam's ferret, but I haven't let everything pass unnoticed. I have opinions like other men, and I prefer to take them with me when I bid adieu to Red Jack tonight. Please don't press Cadron, captain. He has gone quite far enough. You must let Manitou's Mouth tell the rest."

Baffled thus by language which still further impressed him, Raymond turned his attention to the diagram again.

Cadron explained it in full. He showed where the trail to Vulture Gulch branched off from the road Raymond had traveled over the mountain, and described it in all its windings to the famous Gulch.

"If I find anything there," suddenly said Raymond lifting his eyes to the man before him. "will they not suspect you?"

"They? Ah, let them," laughed Cadron. "I shall be beyond their reach by the time you make your discovery. This a country vast enough to hide a million men. I'm an old fox, captain. They don't catch Cadron when he wants to avoid the snare. Don't let my safety bother you for a moment nor hold you back from Vulture Gulch. I know of nobody I would sooner see receive the credit that will attach itself to the solving of this mystery than yourself though we have never met before. No, they won't get to lay hands on Cadron!" And he laughed again.

"The moon will be over Vulture Gulch by ten o'clock to-night," Cadron abruptly continued. "I know of no better time to visit it, though you can use your own pleasure. You need no guide from the main trail. Sarcy would not do you any good even if he were here. You are trailer enough to find your way to the gulch and back again without the help of other men's eyes. The clue is in your hands. If judiciously followed, the lost detective may be avenged by the strong arm of the Government, and the guilty who have lived in security so long, made to feel the noose of justice. I guess that's all, captain."

Not long afterward the figure of Raymond emerged alone from the mouth of the abandoned mine.

He came back to the men on the Square and held a lengthy conversation with his lieutenants.

By and by another man came from the mine. He wore the garb of a common miner, and his face was thickly covered with the dust of the gold shaft.

He went straight to one of the shanties and entered. When fairly inside he jerked off his hat and threw it toward the rafters with an exclamation of delight.

"I think I played my part to perfection, and the rats are bound for the trap!" cried he. "I know how to blunt Uncle Sam's sabers, and I'm proud of my work. Now once more I'll get to knock the blue-coats on the head!"

He finished with a laugh which appeared to give him a new look. At any rate, it stripped off a mask he wore—a mask of mine-dust—and he stood revealed as Tough Talbot, the soldier-hater.

CHAPTER IX.

A GIRL OF NERVE.

"WE were not a moment too soon in our little play. The boy intended to betray the game to the army captain; there is not the least doubt of this. Now his tongue is silent or at least its chattering will not reach the soldiers' ears. Talbot will do his duty and the rest will follow naturally."

These words fell from the lips of Ford Faverell, the giant of Red Jack, as he was in the act of lifting a glass to his lips in the same room in which a few hours previous Darrell had heard a stern sentence of doom.

The boss of the Yellow Hills was Faverell's

companion and his eyes glowed with delight while the Ajax spoke.

"Not a man must escape," said he as Faverell set his glass down empty. "We must put a stop to this constant tracking by Uncle Sam's blue-coated bloodhounds."

"This will do it," answered Faverell.

"You will see to the men. Take all you want but take the right ones. You will find the masks where they are always kept. You want an hour's start with the men going out of camp one by one so as not to excite suspicion. Now, Faverell, I shall expect a good report. I wish I could accompany you and share in the victory, but you know why I cannot."

The big man bowed.

"See Talbot before you go," continued Don Diamond. "You must hold the soldier-hater a little in curb. He must not be permitted to spoil the whole thing by too great a display of eagerness."

In another minute Don Diamond was alone but not for long, for, almost before he could utter any self-gratulations over the promised success of the deep-laid scheme which had just been perfected the door opened and the fresh and smiling face of Coral appeared there.

The morning of another day dawned and the heiress of Red Jack was up with the birds.

One would have doubted from the look of Don Diamond's eyes whether he had been abed at all, but Coral's face indicated that she had enjoyed a refreshing sleep.

She advanced toward Major Diamond and greeted him with a kiss, yet she seemed to draw back immediately after as if she had caught the look which his last words to Faverell had left in his eyes.

"Is your soldier visitor coming again?" asked the girl.

"Captain Raymond? Yes, he is to be here this morning unless he goes away."

"So soon?" exclaimed Coral. "Why, the men have not had the rest they need after their long ride."

"How do you know they have had a long one, child?"

"Because there are no soldiers nearer than Fort Meade," quickly responded the girl, "and that is far from here. You will not let them go back to-day. It would be cruelty to the men and their horses."

"Captain Raymond is obeying orders," smiled Diamond. "I have no right to interfere. If he intends to return to-day or even to push beyond Red Jack I cannot prevent. I know something about the military myself."

"Yes, but I will ask Captain Raymond to give the soldiers more rest."

In an instant a cloud settled over the man's brow.

"You, girl?" he exclaimed. "No, we must let the officer obey his superiors' commands without interference of any kind. These soldiers are hardened to endurance. They are as tough as mules, and think nothing of a week in the saddle. But I want to say something else to you."

Coral, who had dropped into a chair, made no reply.

"In the first place I will impart some information of a business character," he went on.

"I have taken in a partner."

"In the mines?" queried Coral, surprise visible in her countenance.

"Yes. I owe much to a certain man in Red Jack. Indeed, without his hands and brain I would not be where I am now. He has helped to make me Nabob of Red Jack, and the bonanza king of the Yellow Hills as much as I have myself. I owed him some return, and I tried to pay him last night."

"By taking him in?"

"By making him an equal partner with me in all the mines."

Perhaps Diamond wondered why Coral did not ask the name of the man who had been thus favored, or he may have thought that she knew without asking, for everybody knew who, next to him, was the most prominent personage in Red Jack.

"It is now Diamond & Faverell," he went on after a short pause, during which he had watched her closely. "The documents of agreement have been signed, and all that is settled."

"I wish the new firm success," answered Coral.

"Of course you do," replied Don Diamond. "Your heart is with everything I undertake. I knew that, and I told Faverell so when we finished the business. But there is another matter quite as important in some respects, as the new partnership—very important to you, Coral."

The girl's eyes instantly filled with eagerness and expectation, and Diamond no doubt saw the slight paleness that came to her cheeks.

"Faverell is nothing if he is not outspoken," he resumed. "You have seen a good deal of him, Coral."

"I know him pretty well," answered the girl, almost mechanically.

"Well, Faverell made a declaration last night which I felt it my duty to listen to. More than that, having always in view your happiness and advancement, I gave him the an-

swer he wished. He asked for the hand of Don Diamond's pet, and I bestowed it, knowing that you would satisfy my choice."

If there was color in Coral's cheeks when the mountain millionaire began, there was none there when he finished.

He saw the eyes of Coral fixed upon him in a look of wonder, and while he gazed at her, he saw her color come back.

"Don't you think I ought to have been consulted in this matter?" she asked. "I may not prefer to be given away as you give shares in your mines."

"Do you object?" and Diamond leaned toward Coral with a searching scrutiny.

"Why not?"

"Don't you like Faverell?"

"It is not that so much as the manner in which my future has been settled."

Diamond fell back and laughed.

"Oh, if that is the objection, I will apologize!" laughed he. "I am sure Faverell will also apologize for being a party to the little affair. I would not have given you away to any person not rich enough to become my son-in-law, and as a matter of course I did not want to go beyond the Hills for that person. Faverell is worth to-day a solid million. In six months—"

The young girl held up her hand.

"With me it is not a question of wealth," said she. "You have been plain; let me be the same."

"Go on."

Don Diamond took up a cigar and struck a match across the table.

"You have chosen for me the man I would not have selected."

He looked over the burning match at her, and held it from the cigar as he waited for her to go on.

"I must kindly, but firmly reject the agreement as regards the disposal of my hand," Coral continued. "I cannot become the wife of Ford Faverell, and with all due regard for the word you may have given, I will not, under any circumstances, be that to him."

Diamond threw the match away, for it had burned to his fingers, and had stung him as the reply of Coral had done.

"I did not look for rebellion!" he exclaimed. "I told Faverell that you would ratify my choice."

"You told him this, did you?" broke in Coral whose indignation increased as she thought of the infamous bargain between the two men. "Why didn't you send him to me? Why has he not come to me with his declaration? I ought to have the disposal of my own happiness. Besides I never liked the Titan of Red Jack. I have that against him which makes me almost hate him."

"What is it?" cried Don Diamond.

"Never mind," rejoined Coral with a gesture of dismissal. "This subject is not a pleasant one."

"But we will finish it while we have it in hand. You almost hate Faverell, eh? What has he done to inspire you thus?"

The heiress of Red Jack left her chair, and stood over the man who looked up into her face with an expression of rage and surprise combined.

"Do you want to know?" she went on, her hand falling like a snow-flake on his own.

"Yes. If you have anything against Faverell let me have it," he said.

"I have this: The man's hands are not clean!"

Diamond's lower jaw seemed to drop.

"His hands not clean?" he echoed. "What! Coral, do you accuse the Ajax of Red Jack of some crime? You cannot afford to do this with the relations we bear to one another. By heavens! girl, you must curb your temper now that I have raised it unintentionally. What is Faverell, my partner guilty of? I would like to know."

"I repeat that I believe his hands are not clean, and when I say that I mean that he has committed crime."

"Beware!"

"I know what I am saying!" retorted Coral boldly. "You have forced this from me by the promise of last night. Ford Faverell knows what became of the detective, who six months ago, suddenly disappeared with Whistling Dave and the stage-coach. His hand was in that crime, for it is nothing else. That disappearance means murder! He knew something of the trail Nicholas Norway was on. Was the United States bloodhound getting too near his quarry? Was the trail too hot to suit Ford Faverell? And you have given me to that man! You have made him full partner in your bonanza schemes in order to present me to a rich husband! I will not be sold thus. I repudiate the bargain. When Faverell washes his hands of this secret crime, and proves to my satisfaction that they are as clean as a babe's—then let him think of being the husband of the woman who rejects him because of the death of the Lost Detective!"

Diamond's lips were twitching before Coral got through.

"So you stubbornly refuse, eh?" he cried, clutching the girl's wrist as he bounded from

the chair. "You have sent up to boiling point every drop of blood in my veins. Go back to your room and take with you the irrevocable commands of Don Diamond of Red Jack. You shall become Faverell's bride! It is not the charges you have made that hold you back. I know the secret of your refusal. You have but one living lover now—Faverell! Go!"

CHAPTER X.

SWELLING THE LIST.

"You have but one living lover now!"

These words seemed as so many red-hot irons burning their way into Coral's brain while she stood before the man who had spoken them with a refinement of cruelty as he looked at her from his chair.

Who had hinted at the existence of another lover? No one!

"I guess you'll think wiser by and by," continued Diamond, with a glance at the door by which Coral had entered the room. "Remember however that the agreement has been made, and you know that I keep all my promises."

She gave him another look, which added something to the words she had just spoken, and then swept from the chamber.

"I dropped a match upon a magazine, didn't I?" smiled the nabob, catching his breath again as Coral vanished. "Faverell has had sharper eyes than his master, and when he said that we didn't net the young mischief-maker a moment too soon, he knew what he was talking about. But, he is out of the way now and forever, and I'll bring the queen of the Yellow Hills around all right. Ho! who's in the hall?"

He was answered by the opening of the door and the presentation in person of a man whose presence seemed to unpleasantly affect him—Reynard of Red Jack!

Diamond, who had raised himself half out of the chair for the purpose of attending to the footsteps he had heard, dropped back again and seemingly awaited for the man to declare his mission.

The strange citizen—accounted "strange" because nobody really knew anything about him—came forward, touching his hat by way of good-morning and then respectfully removing it.

Reynard had charge of one of the new mines which had been opened in the hills back of town, and now and then he would drop in to report progress and receive orders.

But on this particular morning it was apparent that Reynard had not come to talk prospects or business, and it may have been the prophecy of his countenance which clouded Don Diamond's brow.

"Well, how is the Chained Tiger this morning?" asked the major.

"Yielding, as usual," quietly answered Reynard, taking the chair Coral had just left. "I have dropped in to request a furlough."

Diamond gave a slight start.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"I am going away. In fact, I am going back with the troops."

"The cavalry on the Plaza?"

"There are no other troops going away that I know of," replied Reynard, a resentful twinkle in his eyes.

"Are they about to leave us?"

"I believe so. Captain Raymond intends to return without delay, and I have concluded to go beyond the mountains for a spell."

Diamond looked the speaker over from head to foot as if he could not believe that it was Reynard who had spoken.

"But you expect to return?" he managed to say.

"Oh, yes."

"When?"

"If we get through all right, I shall be here within a month."

"What will I do for a mine boss?"

"I think the very man you want came in last night."

"Ah!"

"Darrell has returned and is somewhere in Red Jack."

Darrell!

The name did not appear to affect Don Diamond.

"Darrell I know is a bit young, but he has all the knowledge a good mine boss needs, and I would not be afraid to trust him with the interests of the Chained Tiger. You know Darrell, major."

Don Diamond nodded.

"Must you go now?" he asked, displaying a certain anxiety which he tried to conceal. "The soldiers may linger on the trail, whereas you would want to travel straight ahead."

A faint smile came at once to the corners of Reynard's mouth.

"I don't see what would detain Captain Raymond and his troop," he answered. "I believe the blue-coats are saying that Raymond has given up hopes of succeeding with his mission, which, as you may know, is no secret. This being true, they won't beat the country going back."

Don Diamond's countenance caught an expression of relief.

"Well," said he, "if you will not wait awhile

longer, and if you prefer going with the soldiers, I presume I must let you off. When do you start?"

Reynard consulted a watch.

"Ten o'clock is the hour set, I believe. It is fully two hours yet."

The bonanza king opened a side drawer and took out a small book with a flexible leather back.

"No, I don't want any money," remarked Reynard at sight of the book.

"There's a good deal due you and you can have every cent of it in coin."

"No. I am not going where one must spend money like water. I have quite enough to last me till my return. If I never come back—"

"Never come back, eh?" echoing broke in Don Diamond.

"I'm talking of the uncertainties of life, you see," laughed the superintendent of the Chained Tiger. "I say, if I never come back, take my wages and apply it to the secret service fund."

Don Diamond's retort was a look which broadened the smile at Reynard's lips.

"But I'll get back if I can, major," he hastened to say. "Meanwhile, if you put Darrell in charge I'll know where to take hold when I return. By the way, has Captain Raymond paid his respects to you yet?"

"He came here soon after his arrival last night."

"Seems to be a nice fellow."

"He is. I knew him in the service."

The Nabob of Red Jack thought it best to say this as Raymond would be likely to impart the information to Reynard during the march.

"So he told me in the brief talk we've had," said the mine boss.

"Did he size me up, Reynard?" curiously inquired Don Diamond, leaning forward as he spoke.

"Not as we call sizing up, nowadays. I call Captain Raymond a first-class gentleman in Uncle Sam's blue, and I hope to dip pretty deep into him during the march."

"Well, you'll find him worth probing," remarked the major. "He came out on a wild-goose chase, though."

"I guess he thinks so, too," was the response.

"I wasn't here, you know, when Uncle Sam's detective vanished like smoke with a four-horse team, and a driver to keep him company."

"No, so you weren't, Reynard. You came in after the disappearance."

"Some time afterward; but I recollect having heard of it before I got here. It always seemed to me that there was only one way to get at the facts."

"Well?"

"I don't know that any of the detectives who have tried their hands at the case have tried to look into the *motif* for the crime."

"If crime there was, Reynard," corrected Don Diamond.

"Certainly. I have a due regard for the opinions of those who doubt that the Yankee Vidocq was murdered."

The fingers of Don Diamond which had been drumming on the table stopped suddenly, and at the same moment the eyes of the two men met.

"So you would have looked after the motive, Reynard?" said the major.

"Yes, sir."

"A good idea, perhaps; but," with a smile, "the motive may have turned out to be as hidden as the detective himself."

"That is true."

"Did you mention this idea to Raymond?"

"No, sir. I know these army officers pretty well. They don't like to hear unsolicited opinions, however cordial they appear on the surface. Captain Raymond may not be one of this stripe, but for all that, I did not see fit to parade my ideas concerning a matter of business in which, as a mine-boss of Red Jack, I may not be interested."

"But you have an opinion in the matter, Reynard," persisted Don Diamond. "This somewhat mysterious affair has forced itself upon the notice of all. Great Scott! how could we help hearing of it when the energies of the Government have been bent on the finding of the lost ferret for the past five months, and when we of Red Jack have been suspected, watched, almost openly accused? What do you think, Reynard? I've never asked for your opinion. You know how little I have thought of the Norway mystery by my never asking you for your idea before to-day."

Reynard leaned slightly against the table, and looked down at Don Diamond who awaited his reply.

"I think the detective is enjoying good health—as good as either of us—at this very moment," he answered.

"Do you, indeed, Captain Reynard?" cried the major. "This is not the opinion that prevails everywhere. Why, I can show you men who would almost swear that the trail-dog is dead."

"So can I," smiled the Chained Tiger's boss. "You have requested my opinion, major. Now you have it."

"Alive, is he?" queried the major. "You

could settle a controversy which has become famous by convincing Uncle Sam of this. Nicholas Norway alive and in the enjoyment of good health? This is agreeable news. Don't fail to convince the commandant at Fort Meade, if you are going there, and see that he sends the truth to Washington. I'm tired of all this constant ferret work, and by a lot of men who really know nothing about it."

"The real detective—the one who is to win the victory—has not yet played his hand."

"Who is he?"

Reynard burst into a light laugh.

"A jump from ideas to prophecies, and yet I'm no seventh son. Ha! ha! let me quit before I make myself ridiculous. I'm wasting time. I go at ten with the troops. Good-by, major. Success to Red Jack till I come back!"

Don Diamond put forward his hand, which his mine boss took, shook it heartily, dropped it and walked out.

"In the name of Tartarus, what does this move mean?" exclaimed the nabob, leaping from the chair. "Has the plot been betrayed in some manner? Are the soldiers to escape us by providential intervention? No! Reynard has only added another victim to the death-list! Like a fool with his eyes shut, he rides into a trap. And yet he says that the Lost Detective is in the land of the living. Ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER XI.

RESOLUTE RAYMOND.

TOUGH TALBOT, the soldier-hater, disguised as Cadron, the miner, had played his part well, so well indeed that Captain Raymond, with all his tact and shrewdness, had not suspected the fellow's deep designs, nor caught a glimpse of the claws under the velvet.

Shortly after Reynard's departure from Diamond's presence, the Nabob of Red Jack was visited by the army captain, who announced that he had determined on an immediate return.

Not a word was said about the theft of the hub-band, as if Raymond considered it a thing of too small moment to mention.

The two men, Raymond keen and watchful, and Don Diamond guarded and cautious, conversed for some time, or until the hour set for the departure of the troop.

The captain gave out that he was going straight to Fort Meade, and such was his assurance, that Diamond for a moment doubted that the ambush would fail.

The Yellow Hills millionaire knew that fifty men had already left Red Jack—fifty men with masks in their pockets and Winchesters in their hands.

These desperadoes led by Big Faverell, seconded by Tough Talbot, intended to form a junction some distance from camp, and then gallop to Vulture Gulch, whose pretended secrets had formed the burden of Cadron's talk with Raymond.

It was to be a heartless massacre of Uncle Sam's soldiers—a cold-blooded annihilation—and all because the men were obeying orders which had, for the time, transformed them into mounted detectives.

Let us return to Raymond.

Don Diamond bade the officer a more than cordial good-by. He said, among other things, with that insinuating grace which he could assume whenever he pleased, that he trusted the troop would have a safe and pleasant trip over the back trail.

When he said "safe," he referred to reported Indian depredations, but added that the red marauders had not been heard of for some time, and he thought they had given up the notion of making a dash against the mining-towns of the Yellow Hills.

Raymond had hoped to get another glimpse of Coral, but Major Diamond excused the young girl on the plea of indisposition, when he knew that she was burning to see the man about to ride forth to death.

Raymond looked in vain for Cadron when he rode back to the little troop which he found in readiness for departure.

He fully expected to see the miner among those assembled to see them off, and when he found himself disappointed, he began to look for the burly figure of Faverell which was also invisible.

"We are ready, sir," said the soldier detective to Reynard, who rode up at the last moment mounted on a lithe-limbed black horse. "You have not changed your mind, I see, but are actually going with us."

"I like good company and cannot afford to reject it now," was the answer, as the strange man adjusted his feet in the stirrups.

Raymond placed himself at the head of the troop and gave the command to march. The next moment the clear notes of an army trumpet rung out, and the crowd raised a cheer as the march began.

Reynard and Raymond rode side by side, their boots touching as the horses kept near together.

The men followed in close rank behind, and the pards of Red Jack watched the troop till the last horse-tail disappeared.

During these proceedings there stood at a

window which overlooked a portion of the Plaza a man whose face denoted great eagerness and firmness of purpose.

"Off they are!" he exclaimed, as the command started. "I was afraid a betrayal of some kind was in the air, but I guess they're rats for the trap after all! Penned up as they will be to-night in the Gulch, they will learn when too late the folly of playing detective in this land of death. I hold the winning hand now. They don't beat Don Diamond with a stake of this magnitude on the board!"

He heard the note blown by the bugler of the troop, and from his window saw the departure which seemed to send his blood with the quickness of an electric current through his veins.

"Not a man to come back! Not one to see the ramparts of Fort Meade!" in a voice of triumph. "Won't this teach Uncle Sam that the trail of his missing spy is a trail of death?"

The soldiers were gone, and the Square, littered with evidences of their bivouac, seemed to rejoice at the riddance.

The trail leading from Red Jack was rough and picturesque. At some places it ran along the edge of precipices, while in others it meandered through valleys and deeply-cut canyons.

The day threatened to pass without incident and the soldiers saw the sun creeping down the western sky to drop ere long behind the mountains and cast the whole landscape in shadow.

Reynard of Red Jack had been a most agreeable companion to Raymond.

The two men riding slightly in advance of the troop had exchanged incidents in their lives with that volubility which comes of an acquaintance-ship formed as theirs had been.

The army captain was unreserved. There was nothing for him to conceal. He had carried his life on his sleeve as it were, and in all of it, not one blot had attached itself thereunto.

It was different with Reynard.

There was a decade which he bridged with silence while narrating the story of his life. He stopped where Raymond was most interested, and took up another thread beyond the part left out.

What was in those ten years Raymond wondered, but did not ask.

"A man has a right to his secrets," thought he, "and I shall not disturb Reynard in the possession of his."

At length Raymond drew rein and looked at the immediate scenery that surrounded them.

Almost directly beneath his horse's feet ran a well defined trail which soon lost itself among the roughness of a gulch with lofty perpendicular walls.

The army captain took from his bosom a piece of paper which he opened and looked at attentively.

Reynard saw the movement, and fixed his eyes on the paper.

Once or twice the captain had asked concerning Vulture Gulch and the land surrounding it, and had been answered at some length.

But not one word had Raymond said about his intentions, not a breath concerning Cadron and his information.

Thus, Carlos Raymond had secrets, too!

All at once the captain folded the paper on which was a rude diagram and gave the command "Forward!—left wheel—march!"

Reynard looked at him with unmistakable surprise.

"Which way now, captain?" he cried, leaning forward and touching Raymond on the sleeve.

"A little side hunt," was the response.

"A detour in search of the lost clew, eh?"

"Yes, to be plain. We intend to take a peep at the secrets of Vulture Gulch."

"What do you expect to find there?"

An irritable smile came to Raymond's lips.

"Really, Captain Reynard, I cannot tell till we have investigated. Don't you intend to accompany us, or shall we part here?"

Reynard of Red Jack urged his horse forward and in a moment the two men were touching boots again.

"Captain Raymond, pardon my interference," said the strange man. "You say you are going to Vulture Gulch. You expect to find something there. You would have saved time and distance if you had taken the canyon in on your way to Red Jack."

"Perhaps," acknowledged Raymond which brief reply did not rebuff Reynard.

"Do I understand that you made a discovery in Red Jack which takes you down this trail?"

Though at all times approachable, the cavalry captain was a strict disciplinarian, and did not like to have his moves questioned especially by one not connected with the army.

In an instant he turned on Reynard a look calculated to impress him with the fact that he was addressing a soldier who was fixed in his resolves.

"You may understand if you wish that I have some reason for going down to Vulture Gulch," said he rather stiffly. "I may have picked up a clew where all others have failed."

"That is undisputed," answered Reynard. "You must remember that you are responsible for the safety of the men you command."

"Where is the danger?" snapped Raymond.

Reynard drew off and looked at him a mo-

ment as if half resolved to let him have his way without further interference, but suddenly he darted forward and said with his eyes afire:

"You will pardon me again, I hope, but I can't keep my hand out of this affair. The diagram you have just held was drawn for this purpose in Red Jack after your arrival. The hand that traced its lines belongs to a man who hates soldiers as the guilty hate hell's pains. It was drawn to dupe you and the men you lead, and here you are obeying the very wishes of the rascals. There is nothing for you at Vulture Gulch unless it be annihilation. A regiment can ride into the place and be at the mercy of fifty men."

Raymond looked as if a thunderbolt descending from the cloudless summer sky had passed across his face.

"Why haven't you mentioned this before?" he exclaimed, looking straight at Reynard, whose face ought to have impressed him with the truthfulness of the warning.

"I was waiting," was the reply. "I wanted to see what you intended doing."

Raymond thought that this man had warned him once before, that he had told him if he did not quit Red Jack before a certain dawn, his life would pay the penalty of refusal. He had defied the warning, had remained at his post, not quitting the camp till the sun was high in the heavens.

These thoughts passed through Raymond's mind in the space of a second of time.

Who was Reynard? A citizen of Red Jack, and a mine boss in Don Diamond's employ!

Why had he taken a sudden notion to accompany the command across the mountains?

Raymond colored as certain suspicions took hold on him. This man Reynard wanted to keep him back from Vulture Gulch.

He was the spy, the secret agent of the men who held the secret of the detective's fate! It could not be otherwise.

"I'm sorry, sir," Raymond said, at length. "I am going to the Gulch for the clew that is there. Gallop!"

The trail was wide and clear at that point, and away went the troop, boots and saddles, toward destruction.

CHAPTER XII.

INTO THE TRAP.

IN all that wild country embraced within the general name of the Yellow Hills there was no wilder spot than Vulture Gulch. It lay some distance south of the main trail leading from Red Jack to Fort Meade by way of Cut-throat Canyon, and was more than a mile in length, taking in its irregularities.

The sides of the gulch were rough walls of rock which towered several hundred feet above the dry and in some places dusty bed. These walls were deeply seamed in many places as if by the action of water torrents at some remote age.

Nearer the bottom were a number of openings, some large enough to admit of the entrance of a man on horseback. These were the doors to vast caverns of darkness, some of which, as Tough Talbot had told Captain Raymond, had passages of communication like the rooms of houses.

Sometimes above these openings where they did not rise to any great height, were natural platforms, behind which the wall seemed to have been hollowed out by giant chisels. In these places scores of men could hide, and from their retreat could murderously attack large numbers of people in the gulch without any injury to themselves.

Such, in brief, was the spot toward which Carlos Raymond and his soldiers were riding.

Reynard's interference, coupled to the suspicions which had risen in his bosom, had heated his blood to boiling point, and for once in his life, Uncle Sam's soldier detective had "lost his head."

After his last warning, the strange man fell back and looked in silence at Raymond.

"Is the man mad?" he asked himself. "Does he want to lead all these men to death? By Jove! I half believe he suspects me of being a spy."

That was exactly what Raymond thought, and if Reynard had remonstrated again just at that time, he would have been placed under arrest.

For some time the troop continued its gallop. At length the trail narrowed and became too rough for marching of that sort, and the men had to fall back into the usual cavalry jog.

The sun dropped lower and lower toward the horizon, and at last disappeared altogether.

Not a dozen words had passed between Reynard and Raymond since the latter's last retort. The men had noticed this silence, and were commenting on it in whispers and by side-long glances.

The moon was full but not yet up.

There would be several hours of comparative darkness, and then the full shield of silver would be hung in the heavens, and by ten o'clock it would stand directly above the middle of Vulture Gulch.

To an old campaigner like Raymond there was not much danger of one losing his way,

even though the sun was down and the ground in the grasp of night.

The trail to the ambush was plain enough for the keen-eyed horses to follow, and the men were apt to see it quite as well.

On, on went the troop, turning now and then as the trail zigzagged, and surely, though not very rapidly, approaching the slaughter-pen.

Almost suddenly the long lances of moonlight fell here and there, cheering the soldiers and rendering them more secure.

Raymond drew forth his watch and leaned forward to consult the dial.

Reynard heard him say "nine o'clock," and then saw him look up at the moon which was now riding the cloudless heavens in all her silvery brightness.

Everywhere tree, rock and grass were touched with a beauty indescribable, and the tall peaks which almost lost themselves in aerial space seemed tipped with cones of white.

"By heavens! something must be done!" exclaimed Reynard who for some moments had been watching the troopers over first one shoulder and then the other. "I will see if this hot-headed captain can't be convinced."

He was a head behind Raymond's saddle, and as he came up the army captain looked around and caught his eye.

"For God's sake, turn back," said Reynard touching Raymond's arm. "Vulture Gulch has been chosen as the grave of you and your command. I don't want to see fifty of Uncle Sam's bravest soldiers massacred like sheep. As I have said before, the diagram which you have followed was backed up by an adroit lie planned by the hater of blue uniforms. You'll find nothing in the gulch but death."

Raymond flushed again, and his hand tightened on his rein.

"You have not particularized, sir," he said rather stiffly to Reynard. "You say the diagram was made to deceive. Who made it sir?"

"Tough Talbot!" promptly answered Reynard; whereat a smile spread over Raymond's face.

"No such man gave me the map," said he with a dash of triumph in his tones.

"From whom did you receive it?"

The army officer shook his head.

"I betray nobody, sir," he replied, haughtily, and with an air of offended dignity.

"No?" and Reynard seemed to bite the word off between his teeth. "You don't know that Cadron was Tough Talbot—that the miner who spun the web for you—the web of lies—is Tough Talbot the desperado whose hand is against every soldier."

"This is but your unsubstantiated charge," observed the trooper like a person who is determined not to be convinced. "I will want something better than this."

Reynard bit his lip with chagrin. He looked in amazement at the man who thus refused to be warned, and then turned his gaze upon the men at his back.

The moon was shining on the repeating-rifles which they carried across their saddles, and the strange man of Red Jack seemed to burn at once with an intolerable desire to save them from death.

"For the last time, Captain Raymond, listen to me!" he exclaimed, almost commandingly. "I know what you think. I am, in your eyes, a spy, an agent for a certain man, because I am a mine-boss. I am no such person. Beyond the salary I draw as overseer of the Chained Tiger, I am in no way connected with Red Jack, its plots and conspirators. You will not listen." Raymond had thrown off Reynard's hand. "You are determined to lead these gallant fellows to destruction. I shall appeal to the men themselves."

In an instant a flash, which said plainly, "If you dare!" lighted up the cavalry captain's eyes, but before he could answer Reynard in words, that person had spurred his horse forward, and all at once had whirled him so that he sat facing the soldiers in the full moonlight.

Raymond was thunderstruck by this crowning piece of impudence.

The astonished troopers involuntarily drew rein, and looked first at their captain and then at the daring, defiant Reynard.

"Soldiers, your captain will not listen to reason!" cried the man on the black steed, throwing up his hand. "There is death—annihilation—ahead, and closer than you think. You are men of courage, but also men of discretion. The Government cannot afford to lose—"

"Arrest that man!" interrupted Raymond, with the vehemence of passion. "By the eternal, I won't submit to an indignity of this nature! First rank, cover that man yonder."

The regular army is a military machine, accustomed to obey at all times without whys and wherefores.

Captain Raymond had barely uttered the command when the foremost men threw their weapons to their shoulders, and Reynard was "covered" in the twinkling of an eye.

"Lieutenant Swope, take charge of the prisoner!" continued Raymond.

Covered as he was by the Winchesters of the troopers, Reynard submitted to the arrest which followed.

"You deserve to be wiped out of existence for your bull-headedness," he said to Raymond, as he was brought toward that officer, with the rifles of the soldiers still at the shoulder.

"Silence!" roared the army captain. "Lieutenant, dispossess the prisoner of his weapons, tie his hands at his sides, and, if he persists in talking, silence him in the usual manner."

This startling episode had halted the whole troop.

With the assistance of a sergeant the lieutenant carried out Raymond's commands, with the exception of the gag, and the command "Forward" was again issued.

The sudden transition from freedom to captivity was enough to astound Reynard of Red Jack.

He colored deeply till his face was a dark crimson, and with his eyes in a blaze he leaned toward Raymond, while his hands below the thongs clinched madly.

"The outcome of this stubbornness fall on your head!" cried he. "I wash my hands of it. You cannot find a clew in Vulture Gulch, because, firstly, there is none there, and secondly, Uncle Sam's detective is worth a regiment of dead men!"

Raymond, with poorly-suppressed indignation, waited till the last word.

"This caps the climax!" he exclaimed. "I will have no more of this double play. Lieutenant Swope, you will have to gag the prisoner."

A large handkerchief, deftly twisted by the lieutenant, was thrust into Reynard's mouth like a bit, and, in a moment, he was silenced.

He was then taken back into the first rank, where he could be guarded, and the command proceeded.

Thirty minutes later the mouth of Vulture Gulch was reached, and Raymond, with a triumphant glance at his captive, pushed toward the center.

He was looking for the mass of broken rock described by Tough Talbot, the decoy.

"Halt!" rung out suddenly from Raymond.

The men reined in their horses, then dropped the lines.

Then the two sides of the gulch seemed to burst forth in flame, and fifty men appeared to fall at once from their saddles!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MASSACRE.

DURING the next few moments there was a constant firing with results that beggar description.

From above the doomed soldiers where the walls of the gulch were broken by recesses came the merciless bullets which emptied saddles on every side.

Raymond must have realized when too late the worth of the advice he had rejected. He could see no enemy to charge, though all the time the deadly rain of lead was kept up with men and horses in confusion in the bed of the gulch.

It was a perfect pandemonium.

When the army captain recovered a portion of his self-possession after the first volley, he looked for Reynard, his prisoner, but that person was not to be seen.

He had not time to look twice, for his men were tumbling hither and thither and something had to be done quickly.

"Down with the blue-coated hounds!" cried a loud voice. "Slay and spare not! Death to the soldier minions! Wipe them from the face of the earth!"

If Raymond had paid close attention to all this he might have recognized the voice, and if so it would have been a startling revelation.

The man who thus urged the assassins on held a smoking Winchester in his hands while he leaned against a rock and gloated over the scene below.

His face was concealed by a grayish mask which dropped to the chin, but the blazing eyeballs behind it told that it belonged to a fiend in human shape.

In almost less time than it has taken us to describe the scene Raymond was apparently the only member of the troop not dead, as if he had been singled out for some special fate.

He still occupied the saddle directly in front of a large opening which led into the wall itself.

This was the cavern indicated by Talbot, the decoy, and the truth flashed across Raymond's mind in the midst of his peril.

All at once his horse, stung by a bullet that plowed its way along his neck, plunged forward, and before the army captain could draw rein or curb the maddened animal, he had passed into the opening and was in cavernous darkness!

A wild yell of disappointment sounded behind Raymond, and he did not see the many figures that began to scramble down the serrated walls like apes. These were men with arms in their hands whenever they could use them thus, and some had bowie-knives between their teeth.

It was a race to the soldiers in the bottom of

the Gulch, and what followed was a scene over which we gladly draw the veil. In the midst of the masked butchers was a veritable giant in physique, who, seizing the arm of a comrade, whirled him in his tracks.

"Have you forgotten that one has escaped?" cried he, pointing to the opening to the cavern.

"Escaped?"

"Yes, the leader of the soldiers is somewhere yonder. You told him about the cave and he has fled to it for safety. While he lives the secret of our work here, and the other secret, too, is not safe."

These words drew an exclamation of rage from the other.

"Come!" he cried, leaping among a lot of men who were plundering the bodies of their victims. "The captain of the soldiers is in the cavern. He must be hunted down before our work is complete. No witness of this victory must live to put Uncle Sam on the trail. To the cavern at once!"

There was a wild rush toward the opening into which Raymond's horse had plunged, carrying him in a second from the moonlight of massacre into the darkness of despair.

The assassins rushed pell-mell, in their eagerness, into the cave, and in a short time were ransacking it like a lot of bandits.

"He cannot escape!" cried one. "Strike a light and let us hunt him down and finish the whole business. I know these underground rooms."

In a little while a dozen lights were to be seen here and there as the men scattered in their search for the cavalry captain.

Raymond's escape looked impossible. He was a stranger to the intricacies and the dark corridors of the cavern, and his enemies, who doubtless knew them well, had all the advantage of him.

A sudden cry announced the finding of the captain's horse. The animal had been abandoned some distance from where he was found, and though no trace of Raymond was discovered, the find only further stimulated his hunters.

They went everywhere, they pushed into dangerous places, crept along ledges of rocks and thrust their lights into dark abysses in search of the missing soldier.

Where was Raymond?

Tough Talbot, the soldier-hater, thirsted for Raymond's blood. He had lured the troopers to their doom by a shrewd lie, and he it was who now wanted to finish the work with the death of the officer.

The captain had to make his flight in utter darkness, trusting nearly altogether to his hands. He soon found himself crawling along a narrow ledge of rock beneath which there seemed to be a fathomless abyss.

His sword he had long since abandoned and was now armed only with a revolver, which he had resolved to cling to to the last extremity.

"I want to live for the day of vengeance!" was his one thought when he thought of the massacre and of his own situation. "I know whose hand is at the bottom of this devilishness and why. I listened to the wrong man. I gave ear to Cadron when I should have profited by Reynard's advice. Where is Reynard? I looked for him after the first volley, but he was already gone. Let me escape from the tigers now after me and I will pay my indebtedness of blood with compound interest!"

Raymond caught some far-away sounds, and leaned against the rocky wall he was following and held his breath.

Presently he saw far off a light like a witch's lantern. It moved hither and thither, and then he saw another and another, till he knew what it meant.

All at once he beheld a light in his rear!

It seemed to be moving along the very ledge he occupied, and, as the lights in his front were approaching he stood between two fires and like a wolf caught by the jaws of a steel-trap!

Above him towered, he knew not to what height, a smooth, perpendicular wall impossible to scale.

Raymond crept forward but found no way back from the ledge, and the lights in front were so near that he could see behind them the figures of his foes.

He stopped and looked first one way and then another. Beneath all was dark. He might be standing over an abyss to drop into which would be certain death.

For a moment he stood against the wall and watched the approaching lights.

He drew his revolver and cocked it, as he seemed to measure the distance between him and the enemy.

There was not a spare inch between him and the edge of the ledge.

"Ha! I am undeceived at last!" he suddenly cried. "I see the man who approaches. He is Cadron no longer to me, but Tough Talbot," and he glared at the nimble figure creeping along the narrow shelf behind the foremost light.

A backward glance showed him that the other party was coming up, and that the trap was closing on him with terrible certainty.

Raymond kept his eyes fixed on Tough Talbot till his blood seemed to boil.

"I'll send you ahead of me!" he muttered, and

then he raised his revolver and covered the scoundrel.

A loud explosion followed the touching of the trigger, and a wild cry rung out.

Raymond thrust the smoking weapon into his belt and swung his body over the ledge. The next instant he loosened his hands and fell down—down—down!

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK IN RED JACK.

AT almost the identical moment of the occurrence of these events in Vulture Gulch, a scene to which we must transport the reader was transpiring in Red Jack.

The hands of the clock in Don Diamond's private room were pointing to ten, the reddish-hour in the history of Vulture Gulch, when the Dakota millionaire was disturbed by the opening of his door.

At first he did not even look around.

But in a moment the major felt that a strange presence had invaded his chamber, and when he stopped the pen in the middle of a line, he discovered that an unexpected guest had come.

Diamond fell back in his chair and stared at the person at the very edge of the table.

He saw a pair of deep and cold gray eyes looking down upon him, and, on the table itself, rested a hand as white as the snow on the lofty peaks of the Yellow Hills.

His visitor was a woman past thirty, perhaps, though there was a strangely youthful look in the finely-chiseled features.

She was not unknown to the Croesus of Red Jack, though she had never before crossed his threshold, and the major's look told that she was the last person he would have invited thither.

"Good-night, major," said she, a smile for the man's astonishment playing with her lips as she uttered the salutation. "I knocked, but you gave me no attention, so I came right in."

"Have a chair," answered Diamond, in the voice of a man who finds himself compelled to put up with a bad bargain.

His visitor stepped back and dropped into the chair, which was so placed that it brought her face to face with the man.

"You will not come to see me," she resumed; "therefore, when I have business with you, I must come to your house."

Business with him! Don Diamond looked searchingly at the woman as he mentally echoed her last words.

This woman was Zeo—Zeo, the Enchantress, some called her—but the major was not one of those who had fallen a victim to her wiles.

She owned the only big mine outside of his own possessions of that sort. Her strike, called the Yellow Witch, was as good as the Chained Tiger, and, if his spies had reported the truth, it bid fair to rival the Bulldog. Zeo had followed close upon his heels to the Hills. He had barely laid the foundations of Red Jack ere she was on the ground, and her luck or cunning, he did not know which, had made her rich.

The Yellow Witch had been a veritable Naboth's vineyard to Don Diamond ever since the rise of its fame. He had tried to buy the owner out, but she would not sell. Then he had ventured, through certain men like Tough Talbot and Faverell, to frighten her off, but with the same result.

Now had Zeo come to sell out? Was she rich enough, and had she concluded to quit the country where she had no friends, but only secret enemies, who begrudged her every dollar she took from the ground?

Grasping at this thought, Don Diamond waited for Zeo to proceed.

If she wanted to sell, she must say so. He was not going to appear anxious.

"Major," suddenly continued the Enchantress, "I want some information. You served through the war—fighting in the armies of the East under all their leaders, from McClellan to Grant."

Diamond's hopes fell.

"You have my army record pat, madam," answered Red Jack's nabob.

"After the war you went to Mexico, and took service under the revolutionary leaders."

"I did."

The major seemed anxious from his prompt answers to get quickly at the gist of the woman's business.

"Well, after the execution of the unfortunate Maximilian, you came up into Arizona."

Don Diamond gave a sudden start.

"I?" he exclaimed. "Isn't it just possible that you may be mistaken?"

"I will convince you in a moment that I cannot be," was the quiet response, although the gray eyes seemed to get an expressive twinkle which enlivened them. "Yes, you came up into Arizona, riding a fine roan horse. You settled first at Truxillo, then at Lariat City, at which latter place you had trouble with a man named Lopez, the only native Mexican of prominence who heartily indorsed the empire."

By this time Don Diamond had experienced several changes of countenance, and he was exhibiting to Zeo a face quite white and very anxious and troubled.

He evidently wished the female mine-owner

of Red Jack at the antipodes or elsewhere, but he was careful not to consign her to any particular place in audible tones.

"I don't intend to bother you with a long visit," Zeo went on. "You may have private business on hand of a nature far more important than mine can ever be in your eyes. As I have said, I want a little information. What ever became of Luis Lopez's little valise?"

Don Diamond's hand let the pen which it had held from the commencement of the visit fall on the table.

"A strange question, I declare, madam!" said he with an enforced laugh. "What can I, sitting here hundreds of miles from Lariat City know of a Mexican's luggage?"

Zeo's countenance, suddenly grown stern, did not relax.

"How do you think I came to know that Lopez had a valise?" she asked.

"I do not know."

She leaned toward Don Diamond and was about to speak, when the door opened, and a man-servant, who had been sent to the wine-cellar, appeared, but halted when he saw Zeo.

"Ah! wine, is it?" exclaimed Zeo, seeing what was in the servant's hands.

Don Diamond impolitely growled an assent.

"I'll drink with you!" she announced.

Major Diamond obeyed. The man advanced, and looking sharply at Zeo, set the bottles on the table.

As he drew back he received a gesture from his master which he acknowledged with the slightest of nods, and then vanished.

Diamond broke the seal of one of the bottles and brought two goblets from a sideboard in the nearest wall.

As Zeo took up the bottle to fill her glass, she looked up into Don Diamond's eyes.

"Your wine brings me back to the name we have just mentioned," smiled she. "I find the words 'Ranch Lopez' blown into the bottle. Is the legend in any way connected with the valise I'm asking about?"

"Not at all," answered the nabob, assuming an air of coolness. "You seem determined to keep me in the dark."

"In the dark, eh?" and the bottle fell back as Zeo leaned forward again. "Do I have to freshen your memory, Don Diamond? Come, don't try to play with one who knows a good deal of the past. Maybe I'll sell out to you before I quit this house. You want to wed the Bulldog to the Yellow Witch, and I may give my consent on easy terms, too. Now, don't trifle when I can, in a word, convince you that I know something which approaches a state secret. Let me see: We were at the Mexican's valise, weren't we—at Don Lopez's 'luggage,' as you call it?"

There was no reply.

"It was a queer-shaped valise, with a little chain pendent from the lock," continued Zeo, the Enchantress. "When he came to Lariat City it dangled from his saddle, and he was known to set great store on it. One night Lopez and the valise turned up missing. Strange, wasn't it?"

Zeo was beating a little tattoo on the table with the bottom of her glass.

"When did this happen?" asked Don Diamond.

She gave him a look of wonder.

"Do you ask me this question, major?" she exclaimed. "Where is your memory, man? It happened, as you know, on the 15th of March—"

Something was heard to fall beyond the room.

"Never mind. I think I recollect the circumstances," Diamond assented.

"Of course you do," replied Zeo, turning to him again. "Now, Major Diamond, will you give me the contents of Don Lopez's valise for a title deed to the Yellow Witch? That's why I came here."

The Croesus seem to fall back out of breath.

"I haven't the price you ask!" he cried.

The Enchantress left her chair and bent forward, one of her transparent hands on the table the other about the arm of her chair.

"Don't say that, Don Diamond. Don't look into my face and declare that you haven't the price I ask for the Yellow Witch. I've here, fairly in your teeth, that I know better. You want my mine; I want the treasures of the black valise; I want them now! What is your reply—yes or no? When I sell I quit Red Jack forever. I remain here till I get my price."

"Heavens! what a woman!" mentally cried the mine king.

CHAPTER XV.

WINE WORKS WONDERS.

WITH her gray eyes full of animation and her nerves strung to their utmost tension, Zeo stood before Major Diamond waiting for the answer she had just demanded.

"You have the price; I the mine!" she went on. "A few papers for a bonanza! What makes you hesitate, Major Diamond? They say you did not hold back when you saw the death crater of Petersburg before you, but that, sword in hand, you led your men to destruction. Now

I break you all up with a business proposition. I thought I was dealing with a man of nerve."

She drew back and looked at him.

"Woman, you don't know what you've asked!" cried he.

"I do. I've asked for the contents of Luis Lopez's valise, but I don't want them for nothing. Fair exchange is not robbery. The Yellow Witch—the mine you have coveted ever since it has been opened—is within reach."

"I repeat that I cannot buy it at the price you've named."

"You cannot, eh? Don't you mean that you won't?"

"You intend to have it so, I see," was the reply, and Diamond seemed to bite his lips.

"Just as you please. I withdraw the Yellow Witch from the market. It will never be offered again while grass grows and water runs. A mine for an old valise; think of it."

"Madam, you have forgotten your wine," smiled Diamond, feeling that he had obtained a triumph and that he could afford to banter her a little.

"So I have!" exclaimed Zeo, catching up the bottle and pouring out a full glass.

He watched her narrowly.

The single ring on her hand sparkled like the rare old vintage she raised to her lips.

As she was about to taste she caught sight of the major's face over the goblet's rim, and the next moment she set the wine down undrank.

"As this wine comes from Ranch Lopez, it may contain the blood of the Mexican," said she. "I will not taste, at present," and she raised the glass for the purpose of emptying its contents back into the bottle, but Diamond's hand closed on her wrist.

"No! not your touch, Don Diamond!" she ejaculated, breaking loose and spilling the wine over his sleeve. "You are boss over all Red Jack but Zeo and her possessions. You will not purchase Yellow Witch Bonanza, therefore you need not touch its owner. Look! where the wine has kissed your cuff there is a red stain—like the blood of Don Lopez of Lariat City!"

"Go on," he laughed. "I shall invite you to my house whenever I want some good acting." Zeo lost every vestige of color under this piece of badinage.

"Play your hand out," was the retort. "You have played so many cards in your time, Major Diamond, that you know just what ones to throw and when. The soldiers have gone, eh? They were looking for the trail of the Lost Detective and the old stage. Why do all the detectives come to Red Jack when they are out for game of this sort? Why don't some of them go down into Arizona and begin there?"

"You talk in riddles again, madam," answered Red Jack's master.

"Do I?" cried Zeo, coming forward again and steadying herself with one hand on the table while she leaned toward the man in the chair. "I talk in riddles to the man who knows who made the strange trail through the chaparral! I mention Don Lopez and his black valise, and he knows nothing! I speak mysteriously to the man who had two comrades when Lariat City was at the height of its fame. I see day by day going to the Bulldog Mine and coming back those same two comrades, a little changed in appearance, but the same in disposition and everything else. They weren't Faverell and Tough Talbot then. A change of residence has produced a change of name but their blood remains the same. Come, Major Diamond, say I know nothing. Laugh to scorn my knowledge of events in Lariat City, now in ruins, but haunted by the ghosts of crime and despair. Drink your wine and I'll drink mine. We don't meet often, and I seldom have mine to sell. I see that you don't want to pay the price I ask. Look out if I do not get my price some other day."

Zeo turned from the table and walked haughtily across the room, followed by the eyes of the man in the chair.

"She's more lioness than I thought," muttered Diamond. "I did not know I had such a rival. What does she mean when she says she will get her price, some day? She puts me on my guard, this woman does. She will find herself doused in hot water by that tongue of hers. I think you've set a trap that has caught yourself, Madam Zeo."

By this time the hand of the Enchantress was on the knob and she was looking a mock "good-night" over her shoulder.

Major Diamond leaned quickly toward the table, caught up the glass he had filled some time before, and raised it to a level with his eyes.

"Success attend you in disposing of the Yellow Witch," he spoke, with a bow.

Zeo's hand fell from the door, and with her magnificent figure drawn to its true height, she watched him drink off the contents of the glass.

"If success attends the sale, where may you be, Don Diamond?" she suddenly cried, her outstretched finger covering him.

"A man rode through some chaparral once. He was not alone, neither did he come back when he was expected. If I had a memory like yours, Major Diamond, I'd sell it for a thistle. But perhaps you are a man without a conscience! Look among the dregs you have left in your glass. Don't you see there the

bleached bones of a man in a canyon? And yet justice waits! My God! I know now that the goddess is blind!"

A moment later the Croesus of Red Jack was again the only occupant of the room. The door had closed softly behind the visitor, and he had not heard her go down the corridor and out the front entrance.

He did not leave his chair, but sat still like a man who has been faced by a terror and left unnerved.

At last he reached up and jerked a green cord dangling from the ceiling.

The yellow-skinned servant reappeared.

"Is she gone?" asked Don Diamond.

"Yes."

"Take the wine away and lock the front door."

The man grinned, but did not fly to obey the command.

"What is it, Sejo?" inquired Diamond, seeing that the man wanted to talk and only waited for permission.

"She hasn't changed much," was the reply, the grin broadening.

"What do you know about her?" demanded the mine king. "When did you see Zeo before she came to Red Jack?"

Sejo was about to drop into the unoccupied chair when Don Diamond with a word ordered him to stand.

"I used to see her in Monterey."

"Who was she then?"

"Onez—the Woman with the Knife some called her."

"Then, she is part Mexican?"

"Yes."

Diamond poured out a glass of wine and pushed it toward his servant. He knew how to loosen a tongue when he wanted words to flow freely.

Sejo pounced upon the wine like a mountain hawk, and Diamond smiled at the avidity with which he carried it to his lips and gulped the whole down at a single swallow.

The effect was magical. Sejo's eyes got a beady sparkle which appeared to delight Don Diamond.

"Well," said the nabob, impatiently, "what about Zeo the Enchantress?"

"She left Monterey suddenly," was the reply.

"Between two days, Sejo?"

"Between two days."

"Was she a faro queen, or something of that sort?"

"No. She was too free with her knife."

"Aha!" ejaculated Major Diamond, settling back in his chair. "Were you there, then, Sejo?"

The servant bowed and eyed the bottle wistfully.

"Take another glass," said Diamond with a gesture, and the invitation was promptly accepted.

"Yes, I was there!" exclaimed Sejo. "She did not recognize me when I came in to-night, but I knew her after a second look. To me all along she has been Zeo; but here I saw her as Onez, who made one stab too many in Monterey."

A quick, eager cry from Don Diamond.

"Who was her victim, Sejo?" exclaimed he.

"Her husband."

"By Jupiter! I will get a grip on this beautiful viperess yet and stand on an equal footing with her!" thought the mine king. "You don't want to make any foolish charge against Zeo," he said, aloud, addressing his servant.

"I swear by the Holy Mother to all I speak!" was the response, and Sejo sprung up and raised his hand. "Her husband was found dead in the suburbs of Monterey, and with the body was a knife which was known to have been hers."

"So this is the woman who wanted me to come to her terms, is it?" laughed Don Diamond. "By heavens! she may yet come to mine. Is that all you know about the owner of the Yellow Witch, Sejo?"

"About all. She never came back to Monterey."

A third glass of wine, "to keep the others down" as Diamond suggested, was proffered and accepted and he struck the table with his fist in a thrill of glee as Sejo vanished.

"Now, what time is it?" he cried, jerking out his watch, and then continuing aloud: "Twelve! and all is over at Vulture Gulch. I have killed one snake to-night, and hold another under my heel. So she was once the woman with the knife? It was a lucky day for me when I picked Sejo up. I did not know he was going to turn out a very gold mine of information. I am now armed against the owner of the Yellow Witch. What does she want with the contents of Don Lopez's valise? Never mind. I hold a cold deck on her now. I will make my own terms, and before the week is out I'll hold a title deed to the rival bonanza. Killed her husband, did she? And yet she called me a man without a conscience!"

Don Diamond went to bed, laughing over the cards he thought he held against the Enchantress. In another part of the house Sejo was sleeping off the effects of the wine, and over the mountains toward Red Jack rode Faverell, the Titan from Vulture Gulch.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAWK AND DOVE.

YES, Faverell, Don Diamond's right bower, was coming back.

The giant of the Yellow Hills was well mounted, and his horse was bearing him bravely over the rough mountain trail.

As he swung round a curve and saw far away in the first flushes of a new day the scattered roofs of Red Jack, a smile played with the lips under the dark mustache, and his look, a little weary till then, became fresh and animated.

"I call it a pretty clean sweep," said Faverell to himself—the Titan had a fashion of talking aloud when alone. "There was but one accident, but we can afford to put up with it, seeing what we've accomplished. Nobody left to tell the tale, and things left in such a shape that'll make the Injuns foot the bill! It'll be long before Uncle Sam sends another company o' cavalry a-hunting a secret that is not for the service to find out. Mebbe the Gov'ment won't try it again."

Talking thus, Faverell rode on now down the mountain, and over the lower trail, which at last brought him to Red Jack, which he entered quietly, taking his well-blown horse to the stables without exciting any attention.

He was the first man back from ill-fated Vulture Gulch. The others were behind him, just where he did not know.

They were not likely to come in soon. Some would wait till night, and then sneak in under cover of darkness, like men who stain their hands with human blood.

Faverell walked through the early light to Don Diamond's house.

He was promptly admitted by Sejo, who had seen his stalwart figure from one of the windows, and guessed that his master would be delighted to see his henchman.

Faverell went to the private room and found it empty.

The man bore evidences of hard riding, and there was a black-and-blue spot on one of his cheeks.

"Tell the major I'm byer!" said Faverell to Sejo, who awaited his pleasure at the door.

Then he went to the sideboard and found something that suited his taste. At any rate he drank heartily of what he found, and threw himself into Don Diamond's chair, where, with his dusty boots on the table, he made himself at home.

He was not disturbed for five minutes. Then the door opened and he found himself face to face with—Coral!

With a little exclamation of surprise Faverell jerked his feet down while Coral who had taken several steps forward before recognizing him fell back losing color but staring at him in amazement.

"I'm an early bird, Miss Coral," began Big Faverell his eyes already devouring the fresh young beauty of the girl whom he looked upon as his bride in prospect.

"So I see," answered Coral looking at the marks of his journey visible everywhere. "I thought father was here. You are waiting for him, aren't you?"

"I am," responded Faverell.

A strange light seemed to leap into existence in the girl's eyes. She lost color under its influence as it were, and her hands shut tightly as if in emphasis of some sudden resolve.

The next moment she had crossed the room and was standing beside the big tough who was looking up into her face wondering what had actuated the girl.

"I want to talk to you—a minute—not longer," she went on with hardly a breath between her start toward him and the halt. "I don't intend to deceive you or any one else. I know what has passed between you and Don Diamond."

Faverell noticed that she called the Dakota nabob by the name by which he was everywhere known.

"You are half partner," she continued. "He says that he could not think of me having a husband not my equal in point of wealth. He did not think of anything else, I presume."

"I don't know," answered Faverell for want of something better to say, for, to say the least, the girl's frankness had somewhat bewildered him.

"I am not here to question your part in the transaction," Coral proceeded. "I shall tell him by and by what I will tell you now. I do not approve of that part of the covenant which disposes of me. In other words, Captain Faverell, I reject the clause which gives me to you for your wife."

The Titan of Red Jack nearly bounded from his chair, for the cool words of the heiress of the Yellow Hills went through him like an electric bolt.

He, big rough that he was, never thought of Coral opposing Don Diamond's will. It was like a lamb resisting the commands of a tiger.

The girl gave him a smile for his astonishment.

"You might think differently on reflection," ventured Ford, when he caught second breath.

"I have reflected all night," rejoined Coral.

"I have slept on the matter and my resolution has been formed. I can't approve of the agreement which disposes of me to you. You will still be half-partner, and the earnings of the mines—"

"They're worth nothing beside you, girl!" broke in Faverell. "I'd go to the ends of the earth and through thick and thin for your smile. You don't know the feelings that produced the avowal I made to Don Diamond when we settled the business about the mines. Your wealth never entered into my thoughts. What do I care for money? Haven't I thrown to the winds in my time a dozen fortunes? I am Ford Faverell, the man of many adventures, but I can settle down and become a model husband."

"All of which may be true," quietly answered Coral. "I reserve the right to dispose of myself when and where and to whom I think proper."

"Despite his wishes?"

"Even against his commands!" was the firm response.

Again she got a look of amazement from the man in the chair.

"I warn you to look out!" said Faverell, smiling as he spoke. "I am one of those men who hold people to their bargains."

"Are you, indeed?" said the girl in return. "Then, do I understand that you will hold Don Diamond to the agreement?"

"To every clause of it."

She drew off and looked at him.

"I see you with the mask off!" exclaimed she. "I now know Ford Faverell as I never knew him before. I am not combative. I want no conflict with the powers that rule in Red Jack; but I shall oppose to the bitter end the power which would make me the wife of my father's slave!"

The dark face of the Yellow Hills Titan got darker still.

He sprung up so suddenly that the chair toppled and threatened to capsize, but he righted it with a quick movement and then turned to Coral.

"I like hot blood and black eyes!" cried he. "I like to see them snap above the cheeks of stirred-up beauty. So you don't want to become the wife of Big Faverell of Dakota? Does it look too much like hawk and dove, my girl?"

He came toward her, a mountain of passion on the move, and Coral saw that he had roused all the tiger in the big sport's nature. For all this, she did not quail.

"My thoughts are my own," she retorted, her hands clinched with firmness and her eyes abating none of the resistance he had aroused. "Do you want me to repeat my decision, or—" "It is not necessary," he interrupted. "It would not mend matters if you did. The covenant made you my betrothed, and your spirit cannot unmake it. No, Coral; you have been bound to Faverell with an oath which the man who made it dare not break, and which, if you knew the truth, you would not want broken."

He seemed to take delight in this revelation.

"Let the future answer for itself, sir! Don Diamond is coming. You came to meet him. I will retire"—as she did so, at once.

"A little tempest ahead, I see, but I'm equal to the occasion," muttered he. "A girl like that is worth risking a good deal for, and I'll risk my head."

Don Diamond entered.

He recognized Faverell.

"You are back! It was accomplished to the letter! I see it in your eyes!" he exclaimed.

"When do we fail?" responded Faverell, a grin of triumph upon his repulsive face.

"Ha! ha! I thought you would make a clean sweep of it. Did they ride into the trap? Tell me all," and the major threw himself excitedly into a chair.

Big Faverell proceeded to give a thrilling and highly colored description of the massacre of the cavalymen in Vulture Gulch. It was a pitiless recital of as cruel a butchery as ever took place in the wild West, and the man who spun the story had an auditor who seemed to gloat over every word.

"What became of Reynard?" eagerly inquired Diamond.

"He went down with the rest."

"Are you certain of this, Faverell?"

"I am. There was no escape though Raymond gave us some trouble in the cave."

"Ah! the captain was the last man, then?"

"He was. His escape from the bullets borders on the miraculous. Did the man wear a steel vest?"

"No! He would have spurned such a protection," assured the major.

"We had a long chase after him in the many chambered cavern," proceeded the Titan. "In one of its rooms we met with the only accident that mars the expedition."

"What was that?"

"Raymond was run down along one of the many le'ges. We got him between two fires and were closing in when he resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible. Talbot was in the lead. He had lost his mask, and, as he was bearing a light, it is presumed that Raymond recognized him. All at once the cavern resounded with a revolver-shot, and Talbot pitched back-

ward nearly knocking three of us from the ledge."

"Dead?" cried Don Diamond. "Did the shot finish Talbot?"

"Not quite, but it was a miracle that it did not."

"What became of the captain?"

"The spot from which he fired the shot was found unoccupied."

"Where was he?"

Faverell smiled.

"He had taken the most desperate chances imaginable. After shooting Talbot he lowered himself over the wall of an unsounded chasm and dropped."

"How far?"

"Heaven knows," answered Faverell. "We came to the conclusion that the pit is well-nigh fathomless. There is no trail to the bottom; the walls are perpendicular, and a stone dropped into the place sends up no sound of its striking."

Diamond seemed to shudder.

"Thus the trail of the blue-coated trail-hunters has ended," observed he. "You left among the dead in the gulch ample evidence of red-skin work?"

"Yes," smiled Faverell. "Before long Uncle Sam will have an Indian war on his hands. And all for a man and an Overland stage!"

The boss of Red Jack was silent for a moment, then added:

"A thousand thanks, of course, Faverell. Now, I have other work for you."

CHAPTER XVII.

ROBBED AND TEMPTED.

As the day advanced other men, singly and in groups, rode quietly into Red Jack. Among them was one who wore a bloody bandage around his head, and whose eyes emitted sparks of fiery triumph.

This person went almost direct to Major Diamond's house, and was congratulated on his "narrow escape," of which the nabob seemed to have heard.

"He didn't intend that I should escape," growled the man with the bandaged head when he had displayed a ragged wound along the left temple. "I presume the torches destroyed his aim. At any rate we made short work of the blue-coats, and their captain has gone to deliver his report by way of the bottomless pit. The firing was superb, major. They tumbled right and left—men and horses, and, when we went down to the finish, it was better still. Now let Uncle Sam learn by experience that he mustn't make ferrets of his soldiers. I wish there had been a regiment instead of a troop. The result would have been the same. We had them completely at our mercy, like rats in a trap."

Tough Talbot, the soldier-hater, was in his element while relating the story of the massacre in Vulture Gulch, and Major Diamond humored him by listening to the entire account.

"What say you about Reynard?" anxiously asked Don Diamond, recalling the reply Big Faverell had given to the same inquiry.

"Oh, he fared as the rest did, of course, not one of them escaped."

"Were all the bodies scalped?"

"About all. A few may have escaped in the confusion. We left among the dead plenty of evidences of Injun work. Nothing was brought away."

"I call the work well done," approvingly smiled Diamond. "As you say, Talbot, Uncle Sam will now give up hunting for the lost ferret. He couldn't have intrusted this last expedition to a more troublesome man than Carlos Raymond. He was just the person to stick to the trail till he found something. I knew him in the service, and when, after a lapse of nineteen years, he crossed yon threshold and stood before me in the light of a soldier-detective, I knew we had to crush some one. And, in this instance, the soldiers had to share the fate of their leader."

Tough Talbot went to his cabin, and threw himself upon the rude cot that occupied one corner.

"I told him nothing was brought from the battle-field, but my trophy is not for his eyes," said Talbot to himself, as he took from his bosom a small locket which he opened.

The light which came in at the window enabled him to see the small gold locket he held in his hand, and when he opened it and gazed on the portrait of a young girl, he smiled.

"I wonder who she is?" he continued, for the soldier-hater had robbed the dead—a thing not at all beneath him. "I like those eyes. They must be blue, and the hair brown and like silk. She's fully as pretty as Coral, and if I could find out something about her, I'd give Coral up and thus let Faverell have a free road to her charms."

He continued to hold the face before his eyes, and to look at it with all the guilty passion of a man of his sort.

All at once a shadow fell across the surface of the miniature, and Tough Talbot, with a quick start, threw a look toward the window.

A face was there, and as he caught sight of it he dropped his hands and instantly hid the picture.

The following moment the cabin-door opened,

and Talbot left the cot to face Big Faverell, who now came in with his eyes riveted upon him.

There was a striking difference between the physiques of the two men. With his peaked face and a frame which did not carry an ounce of surplus flesh, Tough Talbot was a great contrast to the rounded features and stalwart figure of Faverell, the Red Jack Hercules.

The natures of the two men were dissimilar, for while Faverell had the boldness of the tiger and never feared to attack in open day, Talbot was the sneaking panther who crawls upon his prey at night with noiseless step and merciless claw.

The soldier-hater saw that his work of hiding the trophy he had brought from the battle-field had not entirely escaped Faverell's eye.

"You have disobeyed orders," said the giant, almost at once.

"I?" answered Talbot, assuming surprise.

"You! We were to fetch nothing away from the field. The future detectives are to find nothing which may remove suspicion from the Indians. We have no child's drama on our hands. So I shall have to ask you for your trophy."

Talbot drew back, with his eyes fixed on Faverell, and for a moment the two men stood face to face in silence.

To deny having any trophy of the massacre would have plunged him deeper into the trouble at hand, and Talbot saw that he was dealing with a man in more ways than one his superior.

"What I brought away wasn't much," said he, apologetically. "It fell from a soldier's pocket and I mechanically picked it up."

"Let me see it."

Biting his lip to keep back the rage that seemed to devour him, Tough Talbot turned to the cot and found the locket.

"Here it is—only a picture," he continued, extending the find. "Did you think I would hang it up on the wall to be inspected by anybody who came along?"

Faverell said nothing, but quietly opened the locket and held it toward the light.

"It isn't much, is it?" laughed Talbot.

The gold case closed with a snap and as the hand of Don Diamond's right bower covered the locket he turned to the soldier-hater and administered a cutting reproof.

"Don't tell me that he happened to discover the trophy through my window!" exclaimed Talbot when he was alone once more. "Ford Faverell had wind of my find. I must have been watched in the Gulch. Some one saw me pick up the locket—some one who doesn't like me any too well. And he went to Faverell with the report. I have been robbed by the man who more than once has crossed my path to my disadvantage. Didn't he change color while he looked at the face in the locket? I guess my eyes saw something of this. He wants no trophies of the massacre to damage us here in Red Jack! So he says. I'll bet my head that he will not destroy the one of which he has coolly robbed me. Captain Faverell, beware how you play against the man who knows your life like a book. If you are Don Diamond's partner in all the bonanzas we have here you may still fail to be Tough Talbot's master."

Between these sentences were oaths of rage and expletives that almost impregnated the atmosphere with the odor of sulphur. Talbot beat the air with his fists, and walked back and forth in his anger like a tiger within the walls of his cage.

When he stopped he drew a wide-brimmed hat down over his forehead and covered the bandage that concealed the wound made by Raymond's revolver in the cavern.

As he was about to quit the cabin the door was opened without ceremony, and he looked into the face of a man in mining garb.

"Zeo would like to see you," the miner said.

Talbot echoed the name in a voice of surprise.

"When does she want me?"

"Now, if you can come."

"At the Yellow Witch?"

"No, at her house."

"I will come."

The miner went away leaving the soldier-hater in a state of bewilderment in the door.

"A message from the Queen of the Yellow Witch Mine at this time has a meaning, ejaculated Talbot. "We are not on intimate terms, for I never could get on with an iceberg like Zeo. Now she sends for me, quite a condescension, by George! and I've got curiosity enough in the matter to obey at once."

Tough Talbot, still smarting under Faverell's lash, left the shanty and went direct to the best building at one end of the mountain capital.

Next to Don Diamond's residence, Zeo his bonanza rival had the finest house among the Yellow Hills.

It stood on a gentle rise overlooking its inferior neighbors, like a castle frowning on the hovels of the servitors.

Zeo had become rich enough from her one mine to plant a palace where her house stood. The Yellow Witch had been well named, and it had yielded without stint under the eyes of its mistress.

Few men had ever passed the threshold of the house of the rise. Beyond the miners in her employ, no one had entered it with or without her permission.

This is why Tough Talbot inquired of the messenger if Zeo did not await him at the mine and at the house.

He knew nothing of her interview with Don Diamond, and thus he went to the meeting with much curiosity and wonder.

The door opened almost before he touched the knob, and in a moment the soldier-hater stood where he had never stood before.

"The first to the left," spoke a voice from he knew not where, and Talbot advanced to the spot.

"Come in," came from beyond the portal, and as Talbot opened the door he saw before him in a richly-furnished apartment Don Diamond's bonanza rival, beautiful and tall.

"Aha! I thought you would obey my request," smiled Zeo as the tough went forward.

Somewhat embarrassed, Talbot removed his hat before he thought, and when he thought of the bandage he had revealed he inwardly cursed himself for his lack of tact.

Zeo waved him to a chair without noticing the bandage, and then continued:

"I have just dismissed my mine boss, Captain Ruby, who goes away immediately. The fortunes of the Yellow Witch must not languish. I want them placed in the hands of a man who has had experience in mining, and who will be as devoted to my interests as the late boss has been. You are not actively in the employ of any one, I believe?"

Talbot said 'no' which, so far as mining went, was true.

"I am ready to put you in the position lately occupied by Captain Ruby," Zeo went on, her eyes fastened on the astonished man before her. "You will not refuse to accept? I know your qualifications. You, of all men, are the one I want now. I will lift you above those who would keep you down. I will make you, by and by, more than a mere mine boss. Enter my employ, Captain Talbot, and I will place in your hand cards that will win every game you play!"

Zeo the Enchantress leaned forward, her eyes on fire as it were and her finger on Talbot's hand.

The brain of the soldier-hater seemed in a whirl and his heart stood still like the heart of one under a spell.

CHAPTER XVIII. BALLS OF FIRE.

TOUGH TALBOT could hardly credit the offer he had just heard, but at the same time it sent his blood tingling through his veins.

Some of Zeo's sentences seemed to write themselves in letters of fire upon his mind.

There were those who wanted to keep him down. Had not Big Faverell, Don Diamond's giant right bower just despoiled him of a prize which he had secured at the one-sided battle in Vulture Gulch?

Zeo promised to raise him to a level with Faverell so far as wealth was concerned. Then he would be armed against the Titan's further encroachments, and he could fight him on equal grounds.

"I need not betray Don Diamond in any way to serve this woman," thought Talbot. "I may be serving him in her employ. By Jupiter! I will take the vacant place, come what may."

Then he recovered himself and looked at Zeo. She seemed to see acceptance in his eyes.

"You will take the place?" cried she.

"I will do the best I can!"

"I ask nothing more," answered the beautiful owner of the Yellow Witch, and then to his surprise Talbot was dismissed, with a few words which he knew bound him to the woman whose mine boss he was from that moment.

He went from the house with feelings he had never known before.

"I have now a 'hand' and an ally which, combined, will let me hold my own," muttered he. "You have robbed me for the last time, Captain Faverell. Look out that you are not robbed yourself in turn. In Zeo's employ! Who would have thought it an hour ago? And what will Don Diamond say when he hears of it?"

Tough Talbot knew that his change of masters could not be kept a secret in Red Jack.

It got out sooner than he thought, for twenty minutes after his return to the little cabin he was summoned to Don Diamond's house.

In the famous private room he found the Nabob of the Yellow Hills waiting for him.

"How do you like your new place?" asked the major.

Talbot started and gave Don Diamond a look of surprise.

"I'm glad of it," continued Diamond. "By George! Talbot, a more opportune event could not have happened just at this time. I want a trusted man just where you are now, and you are the man I would have chosen. Is the woman playing into our hands? She could not have picked up a worse card—for her!"

Talbot made no reply, but waited for Don Diamond to go on.

"She was here last night—came to see me unsummoned," he continued. "I'll wager my head, Talbot, that you cannot name her mission."

The soldier-hater shook his head.

"She wanted to sell her mine."

"The Yellow Witch?"

"Yes."

"Why, she has just installed me in Captain Ruby's place."

"So she has. But she was very anxious to sell out to me last night."

Talbot showed his inability to cope with this puzzle by his looks.

"What do you think she offered to take for her bonanza?" asked the major.

"I'm in the dark."

"Well, she offered to sell for Don Lopez's black valise."

The millionaire of Red Jack watched Talbot like a hawk, to note the effect of his words.

"The—devil—she—did!" exclaimed the soldier-hater, opening his eyes with amazement.

"What does she know?"

"That's just what I want to find out," interrupted Don Diamond with a wave of the hand.

"I'm aware that she knows more than she ought to, and live here with a bonanza in her grip. Yes, Talbot, she was burning last night to sell me the Yellow Witch for a certain black valise, and its contents, of course; but, I presume, she would compromise on the papers."

A sinister smile came to Don Diamond's lips as he spoke.

"Of course you did not trade?" replied Talbot, in all seriousness.

"Would you be her mine boss to-day if I had paid her her price?"

"I think not."

"Now," continued the major, the smile vanishing, and his eyes catching a half-wild gleam, "now, Talbot, I want you to use your new position for the cause. Zeo has secured you for a purpose of her own. What that purpose is will be developed within forty-eight hours. I have reliable information to the effect that she was once Onez, the Woman with the Knife. Zeo the Enchantress we call her now, and that name will fit her as well as any. You are her man to all intents and purposes. You can appear to be her slave—to toil with an eye single to her glory; but you must not forget the band that has nurtured you through thick and thin."

Talbot winced under this address.

"Go to her service with eyes and ears open," resumed Don Diamond. "Find out the true condition of the Yellow Witch; get at her past life, and discover why she wants the black valise and its contents. Report to me at every opportunity, and let me know all. The woman is dangerous."

"Dangerous?" echoed Talbot. "In what way?"

"That is just what I want to know."

"Where did she enact any drama, or part of one, as Onez?"

"In Monterey."

"When?"

"I can't give you the exact date."

"Was she dangerous then?"

"She was."

"She took human life, eh?"

"She did."

Tough Talbot seemed to reflect for a moment.

"Then, I've got a dangerous mistress to deal with," said he, grinning.

"A woman with a gold-mine and a hidden purpose. You need no more instructions, Talbot. Play fox and play it well. Don't let Zeo suspicion you, for if she does—"

"The jig is up, eh, major?"

"Yes, more than the 'jig,' perhaps, Talbot."

As the soldier-hater rose to go he poured out a glass of wine and was about to down it at a gulp when his eyes seemed to affix themselves to a certain spot on the wall behind Don Diamond.

"How does the young spy come on, major?" he asked.

"I wish you would see for yourself," was the reply.

"Now?"

"Now."

The wine was swallowed and Talbot crossed the space between table and wall.

The next moment he touched a secret spring and then opened a door where none appeared to be.

Don Diamond watched him with a smile.

The soldier-hater went forward into the darkness beyond the portal and the door shut noiselessly, leaving the gold-bug of Red Jack alone in the room.

It was beyond this same door some hours before that young Darrell had been escorted by the man who caught him under the window playing spy.

Since the young man's disappearance not a sound had come back to indicate his fate.

He had been caught just when he had attained such information as would have placed Captain Raymond on his guard and prevented the terrible massacre of Vulture Gulch. For the soldier would have listened to Darrell when he would not pay attention to the repeated warnings of Reynard of Red Jack.

Tough Talbot went down a flight of steps

which appeared to lead into the bowels of the earth.

He could not see his hand before his face, and the peculiar odor of subterranean chambers greeted his nostrils.

When he touched firm ground he put up his hand and felt a wall, then he went forward with a good deal of assurance as if he knew where he was, though Stygian gloom surrounded him.

After a while he turned to the left as the corridor turned, but all the time his way was a gradual descent.

"I must be near the change. Ah! here it is!" exclaimed Talbot. "Now for the climb!"

He leaned against a wall of rock and rested after the tour in the dark.

Ten minutes later he turned and found niches in the wall, one above the other, as if he had the eyes of an owl.

In a short time Talbot was many feet above the level of the corridor.

At last he put his hand on the top of a wall, and when he had drawn himself up he rested again.

"We will see now," he murmured, thrusting one hand beneath his coat and drawing forth an object like a paper torpedo and about as large as a walnut.

Then the soldier-hater leaned forward and cast the sphere downward.

There was a second of silence and darkness, then a faint puff was heard and a light flashed up.

As Talbot looked the light spread like the light of a tableau fire, and when it reached its utmost brilliance, he saw the four walls of a pit.

They were lofty and perpendicular, and in the firelight shone like burnished silver.

Everything in the chamber beneath the man crouching on the wall was visible as if it stood revealed in noonday light.

The smallest pebble on the floor was as prominent as a boulder would have been.

"Where is he? In heaven's name, what has become of the young spy of Red Jack?" fell from Talbot's tongue.

His eyes were dilated, and his words followed one another in gasps.

"He came hither. Big Faverell lowered him into the pit with his own hands, but he is not here now. Ah! the fire is dying out. I must try another ball."

He drew back to take another mystic light from his pocket, and then he cast it down into the underground dungeon.

It proved a better light than its predecessor, for it was a trifle larger, and when the flame was at its best, Talbot uttered a loud cry.

"He is there! there!" he exclaimed. "I did not see him before for the smoke. Ah! Darrell, my spy, you clung to Red Jack a little too long. The grip of Don Diamond to those he hates is death. And he hated you."

At this moment a figure strangely human in shape staggered half-way across the floor of the vault below, and with uplifted hands and a wild cry for mercy, fell forward in Talbot's sight!

CHAPTER XIX.

"DARRELL, ARE YOU THERE?"

"Of course he is there!" exclaimed the witness of this scene, and then after a moment's study of the figure lying unconscious on the stone floor of the pit, he turned away as the fire died out and left the place in darkness.

Tough Talbot found his way back to Don Diamond's private room, but it was empty.

There were about the place evidences of a sudden departure on the part of the Nabob of Red Jack, for when Talbot went to the table to quaff a glass of wine after his adventure, he found the one word "Remember!" scrawled across a piece of paper lying where it was certain to catch his eye.

"Of course I'll not forget," murmured the soldier-hater. "I don't see how a man who finds himself in the employ of two masters can forget his position. I'm to serve Zeo, and at the same time play spy for Don Diamond. Isn't this a trifle dangerous, since I've heard Zeo called 'the Woman with the Knife?'"

He found no answer to his self-put question, and with a second glass to keep the first draught down, Talbot walked from the house with no one to wish him good-luck in the double and dangerous game he was expected to play.

Hardly had the outside door closed on his wiry figure ere the room just quitted was entered by a young girl.

There was resolution in her eyes and her lips were wedded in firmness.

"I can get at this perplexing question in no other way," she said aloud. "I will not ask Don Diamond about him, for the time has not come for me to fully betray myself."

The girl, who was Coral, locked the door behind her and walked straight to the wall in which Talbot had touched the secret spring and opened the secret door.

The light that streamed into the room by the window assisted her in her search, but the button which she seemed to know was somewhere there baffled her a long time.

At last she came across it accidentally, and a

moment later she was looking into the dark place from which Talbot had lately emerged.

The prospect ahead did not deter Coral. She now produced what no one would have thought she possessed—a small dark-lantern whose bull's-eye was capable of throwing a powerful light.

Coral took a final survey of the room behind her, and then stepped across the threshold of the secret door, closing it firmly and committing herself to the dangers of the unknown and underground trails.

The little lantern threw out light enough to show her the walls of the narrow corridor into which she had stepped, and as she followed it she often cast the light over the ground in search of signs that the passage had been trodden before.

In truth, Coral of Red Jack had witnessed Talbot's emergence from the subterranean chambers. More than once before the date of our romance she had gathered evidence of the existence of a hideous vault somewhere beneath the house, but late suspicions of foul play had put her doubly on her guard.

Coral proceeded over the same trail lately taken by the soldier-hater.

She followed the corridor in all its zigzagging and at last by the merest accident discovered the niches in the wall of the pit.

Some one had been there before her for there were foot-marks at the bottom of the wall.

The girl contemplated these a few moments, and a smile spread over her almost colorless face.

"I think I have found the end of your journey, Captain Talbot," said she, throwing the light up the wall and revealing the steps cut in the stone at regular intervals. "Where do the steps lead to and what have you where they end?"

Coral had come too far to turn back when further discovery invited her to proceed. Her curiosity had been raised to the highest possible pitch, and, then, she had invaded the cavern on a startling mission.

After awhile Coral coolly fastened the dark lantern to a belt she wore.

"If I venture nothing I am sure to fail," she murmured, placing her hands in one of the niches. "I am going to see what is above me. I believe I am on the right trail, and as there is a life in peril I shall push forward to the end."

Hand over hand the heiress of Red Jack went up the perpendicular wall.

Her light gave her but little assistance now. It showed the dull rock here and there and told her where to reach for a higher hand-hold.

She reached the top when she least expected and imitating Tough Talbot drew her body up and rested.

The little lantern showed her the narrow wall which she had gained, but it could not send its light to the bottom of the pit which lay beneath.

Coral tried again and again to penetrate the darkness that enshrouded everything below, and to see what it held in its keeping, but all her efforts failed.

"The secret is here!" she exclaimed. "I am sure I have reached the dungeon of the Man of Red Jack. In God's name, who does it hold now in its merciless grip?"

Coral leaned over the innermost edge of the wall. For a second she held her breath and then she sent her voice down into the blackness which no human eye could pierce.

"Darrell! Darrell! Are you there?"

A weird wild echo came back to her—nothing more.

Coral felt her heart in her throat, and her hands trembled on the top of the stone wall.

"If you are there, Darrell, for heaven's sake send up an assurance!" she said again after a pause.

The following moment there came up from the depths below a sound which seemed to emanate from the heart of the earth itself.

"I—am—here!"

The girl on the wall uttered a joyful cry.

As she could not see the bottom of the pit she was spared the spectacle the gloom held in its clutches.

She did not see the human figure that leaned against the wall of the dungeon with upturned face and eyes ready to start from their sockets. Unseen, too, were the hands uplifted along the wall, and the parched cracked lips from between which had come the answer so full of agony—"I—am—here!"

"It can't be a dream!" ejaculated the man in the dark as he kept his eyes fixed on the spark of light far overhead. "Some one asked me if I were here. I heard the voice distinctly—not like one appears to hear voices in dreams. I was wide awake then; I am sure I am so now."

"Courage, courage!" came down even while he finished. "I am Coral and I will save you if it be in my power."

"You help me, girl?" he answered. "I am in a dungeon whose walls are as smooth as glass. It seems as deep as the infernal pit. They let me down with ropes, and the descent seemed to occupy hours."

Coral shuddered at the task before her, but did not despair.

"You will find the three arrayed against you if you make a move in my behalf," came up from below. "What day is this?"

"It is Thursday."

"Where are the soldiers?"

"They went away yesterday."

"All?"

"Yes."

A short silence followed.

"Is that all you know about them?" asked Darrell.

"It is all."

"No news has come back from their march?"

"None."

"Were Ford Faverell and Tough Talbot in Red Jack all day yesterday?"

"I did not see them."

"Then the deed was done! May the curse of Heaven alight on the fortunes of those wretches!" cried the prisoner of the trap. "They silenced me when I held salvation in my hands. Don't I know now that a dark secret of some kind is to be kept, cost what the keeping may? Coral?"

"Darrell?"

"Mark for me a way out of this hell, but don't imperil yourself. I want to turn on the banded conspirators of the Yellow Hills."

"You shall!" exclaimed the girl.

"I want to see the hand of vengeance fall on heads it has sought for years. But it may strike down one close to you, Coral."

"Let the blow fell the guilty!" was the prompt response. "I am going back now. Keep up a stout heart till you see my light on the wall again!"

The man below sent up assurances that he would not despair again, and the light then vanished.

"Found, and living!" cried the girl, as she began to descend by means of the niches. "Left to die by inches in a pit! Could any torture be more dastardly than this? I see the hand that throws the card in this game of infamy, and I think I also see the *motif*. But while I can baffle, the play shall not succeed. I care not who would profit by the conspiracy. The prisoner of the underground trap shall not perish where he is. My hand will come between him and his foes!"

She went back over the trail she had followed to the strange pit in the dark, and at last stood in the light that streamed into Don Diamond's private room.

Five minutes later, Coral stood in a small apartment in the upper part of the house. It was a regular museum.

On shelves along the wall were hundreds of specimens of gold and silver-bearing rock, and here and there hung lassoes of various makes and of all lengths.

These latter caught the young girl's eyes at once.

She began to inspect them, taking the long coils down now and then and critically examining their length.

"These two must reach him," she murmured, selecting a brace of lassoes small in thickness but doubly strong.

With the coils in her possession and with triumph in her eyes Coral left the museum and went back to the apartment with the secret door.

She did not think that the house of the nabob was without spies, for she went cautiously from room to room, sometimes on tiptoe as if there were ears on the alert.

Coral of Red Jack turned to lock the door when she had entered Don Diamond's room, but ere she could turn the key the portal was pushed open and she looked into the yellowish face and gleaming black eyes of Sejo!

The gaze of the nabob's servitor fell instantly on the lassoes on Coral's arm.

She felt that her mission had been betrayed.

"Ha! what's to be looped now?" laughed the mixed-blood, and then he stepped inside and shut the door.

Blood mounted to Coral's temples and she drew the lassoes back from his outstretched hand.

"Touch me not!" she exclaimed, giving him look for look. "Follow me or lip a word of betrayal to the master you serve and by the heavens above us! you'll die like a dog of your kind!"

The cords slipped to the floor as Coral concluded, and the step she took toward Sejo drove the yellow curse beyond the door which was coolly locked in his teeth.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET OUT.

As a matter of course, an atrocity like that of Vulture Gulch could not long remain a secret.

The old saying "murder will out" was to have a speedy exemplification in the Yellow Hills, for three days after the events of the foregoing chapters a number of cavalry galloped into Red Jack.

The soldiers were led by a young man who had seen a good deal of western campaigning, and who was known as an Indian-fighter.

In less than ten minutes after the arrival of the troop the whole camp knew that fifty dead

men in blue uniforms lay in the heart of Vulture Gulch, and that nearly every soldier had been scalped.

This was not news to some of Red Jack's citizens, but all received the startling information with the same manifestation of surprise and horror.

Big Faverell said that such a catastrophe could not be possible, and it seemed to take the oaths of half a dozen soldiers to convince him to the contrary.

The young leader of the soldiers was certain that a band of marauding and blood-thirsty young bucks had committed the wholesale murder. The scalping of the dead put the crime on the Indians beyond the shadow of a doubt, and all he had to do was to discover the butchers and then make his report.

He would not attempt to avenge the dead. No, he was not strong enough for that. The Government would deal with the red-skins, and Uncle Sam who had thrown clods so long at the scarlet villains would now cast stones.

Don Diamond listened to the young captain's report with a face calculated to deceive the most searching.

He said that Red Jack would assist the troops in every way in its power. He railed out against the Indians in this case, as the reader knows, innocent of any wrong doing, and threatened to hang the first one who showed his face in camp.

"By the way," said the major. "I presume the Government will now give up hunting for Nicholas Norway the Lost Detective?"

"I would think so," replied the cavalry captain. "He has cost us fifty brave men and much time and money."

"What could his mission have been?"

"Don't you know?"

Don Diamond shook his head and assured his guest that he had never thought much over the missing ferret's business.

"I don't know that it is a state secret, though the knowledge came to me in a private manner," was the reply, and Captain Bartholow drank off a glass of Don Diamond's best wine to give movement to his tongue. "Nicholas Norway was a man who became a Secret Service detective near the close of the war. He was employed by the Government in hunting a man who was supposed to have discovered some gold-mines situated in National ground. This secret holder was a Mexican, but a man who was as hard to catch as the Irishman's traditional flea."

"During the detective's chase he came across a strange chain of crime, the particulars of which I do not happen to have. I believe however that the Mexican was bounded for his secret from place to place, that he was followed by human shadows sworn to wrest from him the mystery he held. The Government was interested in these mines because it wanted to work them in its own interests, and as the Mexican was supposed to hold what he had with the intention of bringing the United States to his own terms, the authorities at Washington put Nicholas Norway on his track. The official detective was one of the keenest men in Uncle Sam's employ. It is known that he struck the Mexican's trail at length, that he chased him from place to place, that he even followed him through the Mexican rebellion against Maximilian, often sharing the same blanket with Captain Pedroz, as he was then called. But the secret still remained safe."

"Where did he lose his game?" asked Major Diamond.

"In Southern Arizona. Captain Pedroz was killed there."

"Killed?" echoed the Nabob of Red Jack.

"Assassinated by the men who had dogged him from trail to trail and through half of the camps of the Southwest. In his meanderings Captain Pedroz had changed his name a score of times. He took a new name whenever it pleased him to do so. When the knife found him in Arizona he was masquerading as Don Lopez, a gentleman of wealth and leisure."

Don Diamond looked at the young officer, but made no observation. He seemed almost certain of a continuance.

"Nicholas Norway came back with his report. One would think that having run his prey down at last he would be discharged from further service in the case; but not so. The Government seemed as anxious to discover who killed Pedroz as it had been to unearth the man's well-kept secret. The detective was sent back to the trail. He was told to begin where the Mexican had been found dead among the cacti and not to call his trail ended till he had worked out the whole puzzle of crime. Nicholas Norway was on this mission when he disappeared somewhere between Red Jack and Cut-throat Canyon."

"It is said that the Government has never been known to show the same persistence in a similar case," concluded Bartholow, accepting with a smile the wine Major Diamond pushed toward him as he paused. "In Europe such pertinacity on the part of a Government would occasion no comment, but on this side of the Atlantic it is incomprehensible. It is believed that the man who followed Captain Pedroz till they finally finished him profited by the secret he kept so well, but of this nothing is definitely

known. The Lost Detective never reported about the probable location of the mines. When he came back to the trail his mission was no secret in army circles. He said quietly but with the firmness of a determined man that he would live to reach the end of the skein of guilt and mystery, and that when he got there he would unmask a double crime, and be willing to retire on the laurels won."

"But he was a poor prophet, eh, captain?" smiled Major Diamond.

"He seemed to have paid for his boast with his life," was the response. "It hardly seems possible that two men, four horses and a stage could disappear and leave no trail behind, yet such has been the case," and the fifty men deal in Vulture Gulch to-night show what this piece of ferret work has cost the Government."

"The game in the first place was not worth the candle," remarked Don Diamond. "The mines never really existed except in the imagination."

"That is true."

"What did the detective think of them after his shadowing of Captain Pedroz?"

"He held that they were not a myth."

"He did, eh?"

"So I have been told."

"Yet, with all his tact and keenness he could not despoil the Mexican of his secret?"

"He never did, at any rate."

The wily Nabob of Red Jack kept the young captain in the thrall of his wine till late at night.

He was not the man Raymond had been.

The young captain had become convinced that the massacre of the troopers was the work of Indians, and it would have taken supernatural agency to have dissipated this belief.

He was one of the few opinionated men left in the regular service to-day, and sooner than be convinced against his will he would have resigned.

When he left Don Diamond's house a pair of keen eyes met him at the door, and he was dragged to his men bivouacked on the Square.

"Pshaw! we've nothing to fear from rabbits, but by Jove! the sight of them makes my blood boil!" exclaimed the spy turning back. "I hate a blue uniform and everything under it. I'd like to mold a whole army into one man and then place a six-shooter at his head!"

These words of course fell from the tongue of Tough Talbot the soldier-hater, and he sent the last of them through his clinched teeth toward the soldiers he had just left.

Already it was known that the next day Captain Bartholow would take the back trail with his startling report.

The little command was fearful of an Indian attack, and the men had looked carefully to their firearms.

"They've cleaned their guns and revolvers expecting to meet the reds who finished Raymond and his men!" laughed Talbot when he thought of this action. "They won't see an Injun twist hyer an' Fort Meade. I guess we'll let this squad o' Uncle Sam's rabbits go back with their scalps on their heads."

The soldier-hater was midway between the Square and Don Diamond's when he caught sight of a man who stood in the light of the lamp above the always open door of the El Dorado.

"Ho!" grunted Zeo's mine boss, stopping short and lowering his brows as he surveyed the stranger. "Did he come with the soldiers? I heard o' no scout as they brought along."

The man thus eyed by the hawk of Red Jack turned suddenly into the ranch and disappeared.

Tough Talbot was soon at the door.

His blood was hot enough to throw him at once beyond the threshold and among the men who partly filled the room, but he contented himself with watching the man already singled out.

"Jehosaphat!" leaped suddenly from Talbot's throat, and with the exclamation he cleared the step and sprung six feet away into the starlight.

"If I haven't hit the bull's-eye to-night, swing me for a Mormon!" cried he. "Now see me open the major's eyes."

He went straight to Don Diamond's house and burst into it without the sign of a knock.

The Croesus of the Yellow Hills opened his eyes and greeted Talbot with a cry of surprise.

"You know something. You have news, Captain Talbot," said he.

"News? So I have!" was the response, and Talbot's eyes sparkled as he leaned over the table. "Reynard of Red Jack, who was with the soldiers when we slaughtered 'em, has turned up alive. He's in camp now!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TALBOT'S MAN-HUNT.

A CURSE loud and bitter leaped from Don Diamond's lips.

"I thought you men told me—even swore—"

"I made oath to nothing!" interrupted Talbot, with the air of a man irritated and speaking through his teeth. "I said that I believed not one of the gang escaped. I did not see Reynard with the soldiers when we fell upon them; the moonlight was deceiving. You told us that Reynard went off with Raymond. I thought we killed all who rode into the gulch. I believe

we did. The man I have just seen must have deserted the party somewhere."

"It is enough to know that he is here!" growled the major. "You cannot be mistaken, Talbot?"

The soldier laughed.

"I guess I know Reynard," said he. "Of course he hasn't come back in his old garb, but I found him, just the same."

Don Diamond's clinched hand dropped heavily on the table.

"You know what is to be done. I am going to commit this man to your care, Talbot; to you alone."

Tough Talbot made no reply.

"The young captain of the troop has just been here. The wool of deception has been most adroitly pulled over his eyes. He has given the Indians all the credit for the Vulture Gulch affair, and Black Cloud and his band of roaming bucks are likely to get into trouble ere long. But if Reynard is permitted to stay here, things may take a sudden and an unpleasant twist. If he is here in disguise, as you say, we cannot act too soon. The two secrets—the old one and the new—must be kept at all hazards. Talbot, I look to you—to a sure eye and a steady hand at this juncture."

The soldier-hater acknowledged the dark commission with a bow.

"By the way," suddenly resumed Don Diamond, as his countenance brightened, "what have you to report concerning your new mistress? You have been three days boss of the Yellow Witch Mine. During this time you have kept eye and ear open for me. What about Onez, the Woman with the Knife?"

"She keeps her secrets well, major."

"Is she too much for you, Talbot?"

"I can't tell you yet."

"But you do not say that you have discovered nothing?" cried the Nabob of Red Jack. "It didn't use to take you three days to get fairly on the trail of a secret."

Don Diamond was looking Talbot squarely in the eye.

"Mebbe you don't like my work," snapped the soldier-hater.

"No, not that, Captain Talbot," quickly answered the mountain millionaire. "Don't show your teeth when silence or a smile would do just as well. I am a little anxious to know something about Zeo's past, and I want to find out why she is so eager to get her hands on the papers of the late Don Lopez, of Arizona. Now, go to the new task to which I have assigned you, for, though you are her mine boss, you have not withdrawn from the League of Three."

Talbot's eyes appeared to catch fire under Don Diamond's last sentence. The money king saw the expression and smiled.

Out in the semi-darkened corridor the soldier-hater halted and threw a look full of fierceness toward the door he had just closed.

"Why don't you set your big bloodhound on the trail, major?" he growled. "Why must I risk my life with a man who is my superior in strength and who must be on the alert, because he is here in disguise? Faverell is Reynard's master in strength and cunning. Why don't you set him after the prey? Are you afraid of robbing Coral of a husband and yourself of a partner? It looks that way. Maybe, by Jupiter! you'll lose him yet."

Talbot hissed the last words and they seemed to echo behind him as he walked out without seeing the girlish figure, statue-like and silent, in the darkest corner of the hall.

Tough Talbot went back to his shanty and armed himself with a stiletto-like knife which he hid under his gray blouse. Then, with teeth firm set and eyes on the alert, he went out to look for the man he had been commissioned to kill.

The soldier-hater was a man with few scruples, and those he did possess had been stretched to their utmost tension a thousand times during his lawless career.

One thing, however, irritated him now, and that was the thought that Don Diamond had commissioned him to deal with Reynard, when Faverell was to be kept out of harm's way by no commands at all.

If the two men had met while Talbot was on the hunt there would have been a few fiery words, but the time had not arrived for the rival pards to cross strength and cunning.

Talbot visited the spot where he had seen the man recognized as Reynard, but he was not there.

The tenants of the Eldorado were losing and winning over the rough tables that filled the room, and Talbot, from a secluded corner, scrutinized every face in view.

He had the cunning of the Italian assassin, turning everything to the purpose before him, and when he found that Reynard was not under the lamps, he went out to look for him elsewhere.

Talbot gave Red Jack a pretty clean overhauling.

He went from ranch to ranch, played ferret in the grounds of Don Diamond's mansion, and inspected Reynard's old cabin.

"Mebbe," thought he, and the idea stopped

him suddenly; "mebbe Zeo's mine may hold him. He told me once that he would like to get into the Yellow Witch, and he knew that as boss o' the Chained Tiger, he'd never get thar."

It seemed Talbot's last resort when he went toward the mine which had helped to make the major's fair rival famous.

At the mouth of the shaft he stopped and listened a moment, then went forward.

In three days as mine boss, he had made himself somewhat familiar with the intricacies of the Yellow Witch. He knew where the leads were, and could find in the dark the little chamber which Zeo had converted into a private office, and which she had furnished as luxuriously as she had her own parlor in the house on the hill.

Tough Talbot went down into the depths of the mine with the only misgiving he had felt since setting out on his man-hunt.

The knife till then carried under his blouse he held along his sleeve, his fingers wound resolutely about the handle.

The point, as keen as a needle's, pricked his coat now and then, and the double edge where it touched cut like a razor.

The soldier-hater went from chamber to chamber. He knew where the men had worked last, and from where they were taking the wealth which was all the time adding to Zeo's pile.

All at once Talbot halted, and dropped behind a heap of rocks in one corner of the mine. There was barely room enough for his body between rocks and wall, but he forced it down into the scant place and waited.

Presently a light like a star came toward him.

As it approached he saw it reveal two figures, and a cry almost leaped from Talbot's throat when he saw Zeo and Reynard.

"In Satan's name, what means this?" flashed across the mountain thug's brain. "When did these two people become friends?"

He held his breath as they passed, Zeo carrying a small mine lamp which revealed her to him, and showed Reynard also in the same garb in which he had returned to Red Jack.

When the couple thus unexpectedly discovered moved on, Talbot got second breath and followed.

They went to the office, the door of which artistically set in a frame of solid stone Zeo opened and waved Reynard inside.

It was with a thrill of joy that Talbot saw that the portal was not tightly closed.

"Now for secrets," he murmured, placing himself spy-like at the door, and then he saw Zeo turn on a light which flooded the underground room with a brilliant light which revealed everything it contained.

"He would not trade," said the Enchantress, showing her pretty teeth as she spoke. "I offered to take the papers for all the wealth I have just exhibited to you. He pretended that he knew nothing of Don Lopez and the black valise, but ere I left I think I assured him that I did not believe him. The hand I am playing now does not progress very fast. The new mine boss is wary and deep. Tough Talbot knows all that Don Diamond knows. He refuses to reply to my hints, but I have not played openly yet."

"The time for that is not quite here," replied Reynard. "They are playing the deepest and coolest game ever born in Don Diamond's brain. The massacre of the soldiers thrills me when I think of it. Captain Raymond refused to be warned, and yet he was a man of acknowledged judgment. Why, he even arrested me when I warned him the last time, and carried me helpless into the jaws of death. One of the first bullets struck my horse, and another cut my bonds, pitching me headforemost to the ground. They are all back here now, adroitly placing the massacre on the Indians. You know why they annihilated Raymond and his command?"

"You have told me," said Zeo.

"They are bound to keep the old secret," responded Reynard, smiling. "They don't want Uncle Sam to find out what became of the detective who for years followed Captain Pedroz to discover on the hunt another trail and a dark secret. Aside from his stubbornness Raymond was calculated to become a good detective. He might have discovered that the stage which started out from Cut-throat Canyon a little more than six months ago, was stopped at a certain place by the minions of a man I need not name here. He might have found, too, that Uncle Sam's detective and Whistling Dave, the driver, were left for dead in the stage, that the horses were blindfolded and then rushed over a precipice, dragging after them the stage and its contents."

Zeo darted toward the speaker, with her hand out-thrown.

"Where did you get this?" she cried. "Have you found the Lost Detective's trail?"

"Never mind," responded Reynard of Red Jack.

And as a light laugh passed his lips, Tough Talbot's hand dropped another inch, and a ray of light caught the blade which ran to a point below it.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAPTAIN DOUBLE FIST.

At precisely the same moment when these events were occurring underground, Ford Faverell, the Red Jack Titan, was riding from the camp on a powerful black horse.

The stalwart figure of the nabob's right-bower was well carried by the animal, who picked his way with ease over the rough and sinuous trail.

For some time Faverell rode on over the mountain-road, lately traveled by Captain Raymond and his doomed companions. Here and there, where the moon which was fairly up showed the trail, were to be seen the last tracks of the stage which had come in that day, bringing no passenger.

The tragedy of the route or the mystery which for six months had hung over the fate of the United States detective, had curtailed travel on the line so far as passengers were concerned. The stage made pretty regular trips, sticking to the old route, of course, and carrying the mail and some freight.

Big Faverell left the main trail some miles out of Red Jack.

He rode down into a country where the moonlight but seldom touched the ground.

Now and then he was compelled to brush aside overhanging boughs, but once beyond the tangled district he debouched into a little open—a quaint valley in the very heart of the wild mountain.

At a certain place Faverell rose in his stirrups and placed two of his fingers on his lips. A minute afterward he sent abroad a singular whistle, which went down the valley and finally echoed back from a certain point.

Riding forward again, the giant of the gold-camp soon drew rein, and then leaned forward with his keen eyes fastened on a man who stood at his horse's head.

"You come to see the captain, eh?" grinned the stranger, patting the black horse's heated neck.

"Of course. There's no one else here to see," answered Faverell.

Without a reply of any kind, the man afoot—who was a queer-looking individual, with little eyes that glittered like diamonds, with long black hair, a dark face and one arm missing—wheeled and walked down the faint trail that ran ahead.

Faverell followed without a word.

He was led to the end of the valley, which was not large, and five minutes later found himself in one of those strange, high-walled basins with which nature has dotted some parts of the wild West.

Beyond the threshold of this place the guide came back to Faverell, and his only hand—it had but three fingers and the stump of a thumb—fell on his knee.

"Now, what does Faverell want with the captain?" he asked.

The Hercules of the Yellow Hills said nothing till he had dismounted, when, as he relinquished the rein, he leaned toward the wondering eyes, and said:

"I have sought you out for a purpose, Montespán. Can you take a boarder?"

The one-armed unknown drew back and looked at Faverell.

The question was the least expected thing that could have fallen from the big sport's tongue.

"A boarder, say you?" he exclaimed. "You do not joke with the captain, I hope, Faverell."

"I'm in solemn earnest," was the response, and Faverell's face was proof enough of the sincerity of his remarks. "Let me go on. Your boarder may be a woman."

"No!" cried Montespán, and his dancing eyes showed that, crippled as he was, the fair sex still interested him. "Is she young, Faverell?" he continued, leaning toward the Red Jack giant.

"Not your age, captain."

"Pretty?"

"I call her so."

"Fetch her on," cried the one-armed. "I'll welcome her to Secret Valley and make her feel at home here."

"But you understand that she is to have no liberties unless I give orders to that effect."

The man gave Faverell a quick look.

"I see," said he. "The bird is to have a cage."

Faverell nodded.

"She is not as old as Captain Montespán, but she is pretty," continued the hermit of Secret Valley, addressing himself, though he spoke aloud.

Then he looked at the Red Jack Titan.

"I have but one more question," said he.

"Well?"

"Will she know me?"

A good deal of anxiety was poorly concealed in this interrogative. The eagerness of the man who put it was apparent in every word.

"I don't think she will," answered Faverell.

"Has she been in the South?" asked Montespán, forgetting his promise to ask but one question.

"She has."

"In Mexico?"

"Yes."

"Was she prominent there?"

"Rather."

With a puzzling smile the hermit thrust his mutilated hand into his bosom and drew forth a folded paper, much worn, and bearing marks of age.

"I don't want to see that," observed Faverell pushing aside the hand which extended the paper, shaking out the folds as it did so. "I know its contents by heart."

"So do I," laughed the other. "Five thousand dollars for the head of Captain Double Fist, now your humble servant Montespán! The letters of the proclamation are burned into my brain as it were. Ha! ha! here it is. The reward is without limit as regards time, and is just as good to-day as when the governor put his name to it and sent it broadcast over the land. This is why I ask so many questions about the boarder I am expected to take."

"But you trust me, captain?"

"Of course. I wouldn't be here if there had been an atom of treachery in your make-up, Faverell. Why, the country is full of men who stand ready to take Captain Double Fist to the governor who is ready to pay the reward with interest. So my coming boarder has been to Mexico?"

"Yes."

The ex-bandit of the Southwest moved closer to Faverell and when he halted their faces almost touched.

"Would it be violating any pledge on your part to tell me just a little more?" he ventured. "Some of these women who have played their hands in Mexico and the Southwest don't like Captain Double Fist. And by Jove! there be a few of them whom the captain himself would not care to meet in his exile."

A smile overspread the bronzed face of Red Jack's giant sport.

"We call her Zeo, captain," said he with a laugh laying his hand on the bandit's shoulder as he spoke.

"Zeo?"

The name seemed to possess a strange sound to the man who repeated it after Faverell.

"I guess I can take her with safety," he went on after a moment of reflection. "I've known a number of charmers who had to go to the tail of the alphabet before they could begin their pretty names. Zeo, eh?"

The big sport, getting a little impatient, ducked his head.

"That's her last name, is it?" persisted Montespán or Double Fist.

"Coals of Tartarus!" broke out Faverell. "I call her Zeo. Isn't that enough?"

"Enough for you, perhaps," cried the one-armed with rising irritation, and again he shook the proclamation in Faverell's face. "I don't want to see the governor. *Sacrista!* I don't want to poke my head into a little noose and then feel it tighten here!"

He tapped himself under one ear with his three fingers, and laughed significantly and in a manner not hard to understand.

"However if you'll vouch for Zeo—"

"I'll promise that if you keep an eye on her she'll never drag you to the governor," interrupted Faverell. "Is this enough?"

Captain Double Fist looked like a man who is forced to be content.

"When will she come?" he asked.

"Some time to-morrow night."

"With you?"

"With Faverell."

"Bring her, then."

Big Faverell went back to his horse and his hand was on the horn of the saddle when Montespán who had cleared the intervening space by a single bound touched him sharply.

"What is it?" queried the Titan throwing a look over his shoulder.

"Have they found the lost detective yet?"

"Found Nick Norway? I should reckon not!" exclaimed Faverell.

"Is Uncle Sam still on the trail?"

"I think not any more. It has cost the old gentleman too much, and besides the ferret is lost forever, and with him the secret he was hot after when he vanished."

Breaking from the touch of the bandit's three fingers Faverell vaulted into the saddle and gathered up the lines.

"I will have the cage ready for the bird when she comes," smiled Montespán. "Zeo and I will get along famously—I know we shall."

"Be careful," admonished Faverell laughing.

"Her eyes are black and dangerous. To-morrow night if nothing goes wrong."

"At what hour?"

"Somewhere about midnight."

The ex-bandit stepped back and threw up his maimed hand in a parting salute, and as Faverell rode away he stood in his tracks and watched him with great curiosity.

"Zeo! Zeo!" he repeated aloud. "It's a name entirely new to me. When did she cross Big Faverell's path, and how? But I'll know when she comes! No, he would not look at the proclamation for he knows something about such things. Ha! ha! Faverell. I guess you would have started if I had told you that since I saw you last I have found the bones of four horses

and the remains of a stage somewhere. And something else! Yes, Faverell of Red Jack, something besides horse skeletons and wheels!"

Captain Double Fist laughed to himself as he crossed the walled basin, and stooping, entered a natural doorway on one side.

Passing along a dark corridor for some distance he emerged into a room which was illuminated by a lamp that hung by a chain along the wall.

"That is what Captain Faverell knows 'by heart' as he says!" exclaimed the bandit, facing a wall on which a strong light fell.

Directly in front of him on the wall in large letters were two flaming head-lines, followed by a number of sentences in lesser characters:

\$5,000 REWARD!

FOR THE HEAD OF CAPTAIN DOUBLE FIST!

The one-armed man read the proclamation through, and then supplemented the exercise with a derisive laugh.

The description of the man wanted so badly by the Governor of Arizona included two whole arms and hands, but for all that he who repeated the proclamation word for word in the underground retreat was Captain Double Fist himself, and to this hunted bandit of two Governments Faverell had just agreed to bring the beautiful owner of the Yellow Witch Mine—the woman who stood between Don Diamond and another bonanza.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

WHEN Faverell rode back to Red Jack he revolved in his fertile brain certain plans for carrying out successfully the object he had in view.

A full partner with the Nabob of the Yellow Hills, and true to the man he had served for years, the Hercules of Red Jack resolved again and again that nothing should interfere with the game in hands.

Zeo the Enchantress was to be removed by a combination of strategy and force, and, as a matter of course, the Yellow Witch Mine would fall into the clutches of the conspirators.

But this was not all.

The woman knew too much.

Her visit to Don Diamond, undertaken ostensibly for the purpose of selling her bonanza, told that she knew something about a past which it was dangerous to air just at that time, and the major's estimate of her to Tough Talbot when he called her "dangerous" was the proper estimate.

If Faverell had known that the man discovered by the soldier-hater was Reynard, he might have postponed his visit to Captain Double Fist, but his keen black eyes had seen nothing of the sort.

He was anxious to get back to Red Jack before daylight and by dint of good riding he stabled his horse a short time before morning.

Entering his cabin he went direct to a little door set in one side of the room and opened it.

A small wall-pocket nearly square was revealed.

Faverell thrust in his hand and took out a bit of paper which he found there.

His face changed color as he read:

"CAPTAIN:—Come to me at once. The pit is empty. D. D."

"Empty! Great Caesar! Whose hand is in this?" cried the big sport, crushing the message and springing to the door. "There must be a mistake somewhere, and yet," he opened the paper again, "this is in Don Diamond's handwriting."

Faverell went down through the morning light to Major Diamond's mansion.

He did not wait to be admitted, but pushed in, his heavy boots ringing in the hall as he went to the private room.

Major Diamond awaited him there, pale and excited.

"You've been away a year!" cried the bonanza king at sight of Faverell. "You got the message in the log pocket?"

"Yes."

"Every word is terribly true. He is gone."

The mountain Hercules said nothing for a moment.

"Don't give me your opinion till I show you something," continued Don Diamond, leaving his chair and drawing a glass of liquor as if to steady his nerves.

In a moment Faverell was following the major up-stairs and the pair soon entered the museum of lassoes and minerals.

"Look at these!" cried Don Diamond, taking two lassoes from their pegs and handing them toward his right bower.

Faverell began to uncoil them and to examine them critically.

"They have been tied together," said he, at last, meeting the eyes that were watching him like a hawk's.

"My judgment exactly!" exclaimed Major Diamond. "Those two ropes combined will reach to the floor of the dungeon."

"Which means that they have been there?"

"Don't you think they have?"

"It looks that way."

Don Diamond took the lassoes and restored them to their pegs.

"Having found the means, we want the traitor," said he, speaking through clinched teeth as he wheeled upon Faverell. "If I had made the discovery a little sooner I might have laid hands on him."

"Ha! you think you know him?"

"I do. It was Sejo."

"Your servant? the man who told you about Zeo?" cried Big Faverell.

"The same. My traitor this time has a yellow skin, but if I had him here, by the eternal heavens! he'd have a black throat!"

"What linked him to the prisoner?"

"Heaven knows."

"Who told him that the young spy was in the dungeon? He did not see—"

"Nobody knows what his sharp eyes may have seen!" broke in Don Diamond. "It is enough to know that the pit is empty and that Sejo is gone. He had access to this room, he knew the length of the lassoes and he selected the right ones for his purpose. I discovered the release by the merest accident. I saw the first lasso I gave you curled at one end when I knew it had not been left thus when last used. I examined it closely and then with my brain in a whirl went down to the dungeon and inspected it with the help of the magic fireballs. Let us go back and discuss the matter, but more than this: let us act!"

"When was Sejo seen last?"

"He served me last night."

The two men went back to the private room. There was rage and vengeance in Don Diamond's eyes.

"Sejo when in the house never failed to obey my call," said he, reaching up and grasping the green cord hanging above the table. "Now I could call till doomsday and the villain would not come."

Don Diamond jerked the cord violently to prove his assertion.

"Somebody's coming," remarked Faverell.

The nabob turned toward the door too puzzled to reply, and with his eyes riveted upon it seemed to hold his breath.

The Hercules of Red Jack looked in the same direction and when the attention of both men was focused on one spot the door opened and in stepped—Sejo!

Don Diamond uttered an exclamation of astonishment while a smile settled around Faverell's mouth.

Sejo advanced in his usual manner, but when he caught the accusing eyes of the major he seemed to lose a trifle of color.

"This is the man who tied lassoes together," began Don Diamond with a glance at his partner. "What have you done with the man you have befriended?"

Sejo fell back a step, his eyes nearly bursting from his head, and his lips trying to stammer a response of some kind.

"Don't talk if you intend to lie!" commanded Diamond. "Open your mouth with a falsehood and I'll let you sweep up your own brains."

During his speech Don Diamond had quietly opened a drawer at his left and taken out a handsome silver-mounted six-shooter which he placed on the table in front of him.

"Where is the man?" continued Diamond.

"What man?"

"Innocent!" smiled the nabob with a look at Faverell. "What man, my yellow liar? Why, the one you let out of the trap."

Sejo started.

"I liberated no one," answered he growing bolder as his courage came back.

Don Diamond laughed sarcastically.

"You did not splice the lassoes hanging in the museum? You did not lower them over the wall of the underground dungeon and bring up a man whom you found there?"

Sejo made a cross on his breast.

"I did nothing of the kind!" said he solemnly.

Diamond was rather perplexed by the sanctity involved in the declaration, but for all this he put up his hand and touched the revolver at the same time looking coldly at the silent man before him.

"To serve me well is to enjoy life," said he, "to betray me is to die!"

"I have not betrayed!"

"Do you say that you have no knowledge of the two lassoes being absent from the museum within the last forty-eight hours?"

Sejo made no reply.

"You know they were, traitor!" cried Don Diamond. "Your tongue treacherous as it is refuses to lie in my presence when I pin you down to your guilt. The ropes went from the museum through this room to the underground corridors, did they not?"

"I have not said so."

"No, and you will not say they did not."

Up came the revolver, the band of Don Diamond grasping it firmly, and his merciless black eyes glittering behind the barrel.

"By the Holy Mother! I am going to kill you where you stand!" continued the major, addressing the man who stood barely five feet away watching his face and the six-shooter at the same time. "Do you want to settle your ac-

counts with your Maker with a lie on your tongue? Is this the way you want to quit my employ, eh? Do as you please, Sejo. Fall against yon wall with your lie repeated, or drop dead with the truth confessed. I give you five seconds for reflection."

Five seconds of time left for confession!

The lips of Sejo were seen to twitch. One of the hands till then hanging at his side came up till it was above the table.

"I have not betrayed Don Diamond!" cried he. "My heart is as true to him as ever. But I will not break the oath I have taken. I will not betray any one!"

"Listen! No traitor and yet he knows!" exclaimed Major Diamond. "You are oath-bound, Sejo."

"I am."

"You refuse to break that oath to save the life that hangs on the pressure of a trigger?"

"I do!"

Don Diamond threw a rapid glance at Faverell. The Hercules of Red Jack sent no advice across the table, and the king of the mines went back to his servant.

"Here!" cried Sejo suddenly tearing open his bosom and exposing his yellowish chest to the lamplight. "You see over my heart a circle with a star in the center. I am the only survivor of a league which came into existence years ago. Beneath the star beats the heart of Sejo. Send your bullet through it, Don Diamond. Spare the face in honor of the mother who loved it."

"Spare the innocent and deal with the guilty!" rung out a voice that dropped the uplifted hand of the Yellow Hills nabob, and the figure of Coral the beautiful flitted across the room and halted between Sejo and Don Diamond.

"Are you the guilty?" cried the major.

"He is innocent!" replied the girl, touching the servant's arm. "If you want a life for the escape from the dungeon take mine! Darrell is far from the trap into which the hands of Captain Faverell lowered him, and I am here to answer for the crime if crime it be!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A QUICK EXIT.

MAJOR DIAMOND bounded from his chair ere the last word left Coral's tongue.

"So you are the cause of it, are you?" he hissed.

"I am the cause," answered the girl, firmly, giving him look for look.

"And the dog beyond you was willing to keep the secret! Let me show him that we deal sternly with traitors in Red Jack."

But Coral threw up her hand and interposed it between Sejo and the madman whose eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

"I silenced him first with a threat," she went on. "Sejo wanted to baffle me. He followed me to this room for that purpose, and at yon door I turned on him with the lassoes in my hand, and rendered him powerless with a look and some words. Don't blame your tool. I helped the half-dead prisoner out of the trap."

"Then, let the yellow conspirator get out of my sight!" cried Don Diamond. "He is forever dismissed from my employ, and if he gets off thus easily, he may thank his lucky stars. Go!"

Diamond's trembling hand pointed toward the door.

Sejo looked at his master and hesitated.

"Not a word!" thundered the Nabob of Red Jack, his hand moving toward the revolver he had dropped on the table.

"Go!" said Coral to the man, and her eyes added, in language not to be misunderstood:

"You are not safe a moment in Red Jack. Go away."

Sejo moved off and in a moment had put a door between him and the man he had scorned.

Don Diamond crossed the room in the yellow servant's wake and locked the door.

"Now," said he, coming back with his eyes fastened on Coral who quietly awaited him, "now, my girl, since you have played this cool hand of your own choosing, I will play one of my own. Captain Faverell, take the hand of your future wife."

The Giant of Red Jack stepped toward Coral who had started back and was giving him a look of defiance and remonstrance.

"Ha! don't you want to touch the captain?" cried Diamond, reaching out and clutching Coral's wrist. "Do you think I intend to give you away to the one you have let out of the trap? My child, I have a higher place for you to fill. Captain Faverell, here, is full partner in all the mines save the Yellow Witch, and we'll own that bonanza ere long. Here, captain. This is the hand I have bestowed upon you." He dragged the white-faced girl toward the Hercules and continued:

"You have but to touch the hand. It makes her yours, and nothing remains but the ceremony. I give her to you officially, and swear besides to carry out to the letter every clause of the agreement."

The next moment the big dark hand of Faverell fell on Coral's white member, and the girl drew it back as if the touch had burned her to the bone.

"It is done!" laughed Don Diamond, releasing the girl so suddenly that she almost lost her balance. "She is your betrothed from this moment, and at the time agreed on you shall claim your bride in open marriage."

"The time agreed on?" echoed the girl, who, in the middle of the room faced the two men with a look she had not shown before.

"Yes, my child. The date has been fixed, and even now you stand at the threshold of the eventful day. But leave us now. Captain Faverell and I have business of importance to transact."

It was so cool a dismissal that it sent the hot blood to Coral's temples, coloring them the hue of the rose.

"Is your business concerning the trail of the Lost Detective? Or, does Captain Faverell deliver his report of the massacre in Vulture Gulch?"

Coral uttered these words with a coolness that nearly sent Don Diamond horror-struck to the table. He looked at the camp Hercules.

"I will retire," continued the girl. "Not for the world would I break the force of the captain's narrative by remaining. If you think that the red innocents are to suffer for the white guilty, I think you reckon without your host."

"In God's name, what does the girl know?" exclaimed Don Diamond, when Coral, having quietly unlocked the door, had passed out.

There was a singular smile at Faverell's mouth.

"She knows enough to give us trouble unless she is silenced," was the answer.

"Silenced? You don't mean—"

"No, not after the manner in which we silenced the soldiers," broke in Faverell. "There is another way just as effective. Settle the whole matter at once. Give the girl entirely to me, and, as Mrs. Faverell, I assure you her tongue will not rattle on to anybody's destruction."

"I believe you, captain."

"Try it," replied the Hercules.

Don Diamond went back to his chair.

"Darrell, by this time, is far away, but not out of reach," said he. "We must stretch out and gather in this young man. If he really knows by whom the work at Vulture Gulch was done, and you know what he had overheard when we caught him, he will go to Fort Meade with his secret. He knows nothing of the secret trail which cuts off twenty miles, and taps the regular road this side of Cut-throat. Faverell, you know what is to be done, and at once."

Ford Faverell bowed.

"Start the men at once," resumed Don Diamond. "Let Talbot carry out the orders I have given him. If the man he has seen be Reynard he will finish him with that needle-pointed knife he carries. You need not go out on Darrell's trail in person. You will take Zeo to her mountain cage unless—"

Don Diamond looked toward the door as if a footstep had fallen on his ear.

"You need not finish," responded Faverell, leaning toward his master. "Zeo, the Enchantress, will soon be on her way to Captain Double Fist unless she sells the Yellow Witch at our own price."

"That is it!" exclaimed the nabob. "Unless she signs the title-deeds you will present, she goes to the old bandit of Arizona. You know where to meet the woman with the knife. Play your best hand, and play it well. Then come to me."

Faverell of Red Jack went from the nabob's mansion with a flash of triumph in his eyes.

"I'm getting on well," he chuckled to himself. "This isn't so bad for a man who a short time ago couldn't call an ounce of dust his own. So Talbot is to find out and finish the man he took for Reynard. I don't believe he came back, for if he went into the Gulch with Raymond he is there yet. Coral played the very hand I thought she would play in the event of her discovering the man in the dungeon. I know that Darrell caught her with his younger face and manners, but I am the man who wins the game. Gone to Fort Meade to throw down some astonishing cards, has he? The major is right. There is a shorter trail, and I can send to it half a dozen swift horses and twice that number of deadly hands. The next catch will mean more than a dungeon underground."

Five minutes afterward the Giant of Red Jack accosted a man on the street and talked to him a little while in quick and lowered tones.

"At once!" he said at parting. "Take the best horses in camp and don't spare 'em either."

"What if he took the short trail?"

"It is one hundred chances to one that he did not," answered Faverell. "You have your instructions—they come from the major himself—and no appeal must soften your hearts."

At this moment there rung out the loud report of a pistol-shot, and when the two men turned they saw a surging crowd in front of the El Dorado.

For a moment or two they gazed in speechless silence at the scene, and Faverell was about to turn again to his companion when a man walked from the crowd with a revolver in his hand.

"Who is that man?" asked Faverell.

"Nobody knows. He came in last night, and we failed to size him up to our satisfaction."

"He fired the shot."

Faverell's look was riveted on the man now separated from the crowd of toughs and standing six feet above his boots with his fine figure splendidly poised in sight of all.

"Come! we will see what has taken place," the camp Hercules said with a glance at his friend. "You can postpone your start a few minutes."

The two men moved forward and rapidly lessened the distance between them and the man with the six-shooter.

"Come up, Captain Faverell, and take charge hyer," came from the front rank of the crowd. "The man yonder has killed Tough Talbot and—"

"I don't think he is dead yet," broke in the man standing apart with a smile for Faverell as he came up.

"Yes, he is—dead as a herring!" said the same voice in the crowd.

In another second Captain Faverell reached the stranger's side, and as their eyes met the Red Jack Hercules gave a slight start.

"They say you have killed a citizen," remarked Faverell.

The man on the Square raised one arm and showed a long slit in his coat.

"If he is dead, he got the bullet for this cut," he replied. "I felt the knife along my body, and his failure isn't his fault. He miscalculated the distance, and then I heard his step. As he struck I pushed him away and he fled. That scene was not enacted here. Awhile ago we met again at the door of the El Dorado. Perhaps he thought from my look that I intended to pay him back, and his hand went like lightning to his hip. Then it was that I fired, and he tumbled against the ranch. I think you will find him yonder."

These words were quietly and coolly spoken. Big Faverell gave the speaker a final look and went forward again.

The crowd separating, made a lane for him to the door of the ranch, where in the sun lay the body of a man on its back.

The Giant of Red Jack mechanically clinched his hands as he stooped over the body, and looked into the face.

"It's no use, cap'n," said a voice behind him. "Tough Talbot is dead!"

Faverell had already seen this.

"Did you see it, Gordon?" he asked, rising.

"I saw it all. The plea o' self-defense can't save the man out thar. Besides, he's in borrowed plumes, for since the shot we've all recognized him as Reynard."

"That seals his doom!" sent Faverell through his teeth.

CHAPTER XXV.

DRAWING THE NOOSE.

MEANTIME, the man whose revolver-shot had finished the career of the soldier-hater had not stepped from his tracks, but was awaiting the result of the inquest. Big Faverell seemed to be holding over the body lying in front of the ranch.

It was regarded a crime for one to come to Red Jacket in disguise, notwithstanding the fact that on many occasions her citizens had worn masks, and when Reynard, the late mine boss stood revealed, the indignation till then partially suppressed began to bubble up.

Faverell came toward the masked man, with his eyes fastened upon him.

"Greek an' Greek," whispered a tall fellow, catching a glimpse of the Titan's countenance as he passed.

"Do you claim that you killed Talbot in self-defense?" he asked, halting just outside the crowd and addressing Reynard.

"I do."

"You say he threw his hand to his hip, eh?"

"It was there when I got the drop on him, and in falling he half-drew a revolver."

"There is no weapon on the body now. The men say none was found on it when Talbot was reached."

The man in the Square saw through the workings of the scheme which Faverell was adroitly shaping for his destruction.

"I can't help what the men say now," replied Reynard. "I know what I saw before I shot, and afterward."

"You are in disguise," resumed Faverell, suppressing with a glance some of the murmurs breaking out afresh around him.

"Do you think so?" queried Reynard.

"You are the last boss of the Chained Tiger Mine. In other words, you are Reynard of Red Jack."

The smile seemed to broaden at the accused man's mouth.

He put up his left hand and in a moment had deprived his face of a beard, which action completely altered his appearance. After this he did not have to acknowledge Faverell's charge, for he stood revealed to all as Reynard.

"You rode off with the soldiers," continued the Hercules.

"I came back without them," was the retort.

That was apparent to every one.

"I shall put you under arrest to be tried for

killing Tough Talbot. Prove that the deadly shot was fired in self-defense and you win the toss for life. If you fail, you know the penalty."

Reynard of Red Jack put up the revolver which, till that moment, he had held in his hand.

He knew what signified an arrest and trial by the men into whose hands he had fallen, yet he submitted with a coolness which puzzled Big Faverell.

There was no such thing as release on bail in Red Jack. Indeed, the shortest time possible was permitted between arrest and trial, and that was always passed by the accused under guard.

Reynard was marched to the cabin he owned as a citizen of the camp and the overseer of the Chained Tiger. Faverell, who selected the guards, chose men who held in their bosoms the secret of Vulture Gulch.

The rude door of the mountain shanty had barely closed on Reynard when six men rode from camp, and once beyond the last hut they gave their horses both rein and spur.

These were the rapid riders who were expected by a short cut to overhaul Darrell the escaped and prevent him from reaching Fort Meade with whatever information he had to disclose.

Away down in his heart the Titan of Red Jack rejoiced at the swift ending of the career of the soldier-hater. Though circumstances had forced them to be companions, there had never existed between them the intimacy of pardship, and Faverell despised the man whose hatred of soldiers kept his blood hot.

He went back to Reynard's story of the duel when he found himself alone. He knew that Don Diamond had set the soldier-hater on Reynard's trail, and he naturally guessed that somewhere in the dark the human bloodhound had attempted the life of his quarry.

But he did not know that Talbot had seen Zeo and Reynard together in the depths of the Yellow Witch Mine, neither did he surmise that the strange man of Red Jack knew anything concerning the fate of the missing detective.

Faverell went back to Don Diamond with a full report of the tragedy.

"There is but one thing to do," cried the Nabob of the Yellow Hills. "There must be a certain verdict rendered by the court."

Faverell bowed.

"In the first place get the soldiers away. Under no circumstances must the prisoner reach them."

"They are saddling up now. In less than an hour there won't be a blue-coat in Red Jack."

"Let them get fairly off first," continued the major. "Then organize your court. He will set his oath against all of you, but the men who will swear that they found no weapons on Talbot will throw the case hopelessly against him. But in heaven's name, how could he come back if he rode into the Gulch with Raymond?"

"I say he couldn't have been there for we made clean work of the whole detachment."

Don Diamond was silent.

"At any rate he is back and the dead man in shanty Number 99 proves that he knows how to take care of himself. I shall not consider the cards trumps till there has been a trial. Between now and midnight you have much to do, Captain Faverell."

The giant smiled.

"Zeo has lost her mine boss and this may interfere with your arrangements," resumed Don Diamond.

"Fear not. The woman in the way goes to Captain Double Fist on time," assured Faverell.

The major leaned back in his chair and looked proudly at the man without whose mind and hand his grip on Red Jack would have been broken long before.

He felt that he could afford to promote Big Faverell to a full partnership in the several bonanzas daily turning out their thousands, and to give him besides the child he had just seen blossom into fresh and beautiful womanhood.

All would have been serene now if Reynard had not come, and if Zeo had never crossed his path to bother him with a rival mine and to demand certain papers once contained in a black valise owned by a man found dead long ago among the sage brush of Arizona.

These things passed rapidly through Don Diamond's mind while he watched Faverell and saw him help himself to the wine on the table.

"Have you ever thought that Captain Double Fist may recognize Zeo?" he asked, as his lieutenant set the glass down.

"Such a thing is not unlikely, major."

"He may find in her an old friend."

"More likely an old enemy," was the quick retort. "Captain Double Fist's love-making when he was making a stir in the world was not of the kind which brought him fame and credit. When he asked about Zeo, inquiring particularly whether she was ever prominent in the Southwest, I suspected that he had some love episode in mind. If he finds in Zeo an old enemy, major, we may rest assured of her safe-keeping. Because the captain has but one hand and but three fingers on that, we must not think he has no grip."

Faverell ended his speech with a chuckle which

brought a vanished sparkle back to Major Diamond's eyes, and the big lieutenant of the Dakota bonanza king soon went off to play out the hand he held.

A tragedy like the one which had changed the tenor of life in Red Jack, was apt to reach every part of the camp in a short time.

It went quickly from the scene of its occurrence to the house on the hill, and Zeo, the Enchantress, listened to the story as one of her miners told it in her parlor.

"It is the unexpected," said the woman, without betraying any excitement, and to the narrator's surprise he was dismissed without any orders.

"I did not get much out of Talbot," smiled Zeo when alone again. "I know, however, that Don Lopez's papers fell into Don Diamond's hands. If Reynard had held his fire I might have discovered the exact location of the papers; but he gave the soldier-hater shot for cut, and now he stands in the shadow of a Red Jack noose. Is it time for me to play the hand I have held back so long? Can I save the doomed man if I do play it? Why hasn't he closed in on his prey before this? What evidence has he waited for?"

Zeo seemed to hesitate between two propositions. Her breath went in gasps, and her bosom rose and fell under the influence of some great excitement.

"I am forced to play my cards," said she, at length. "The peril which menaces Reynard of Red Jack, puts me forward when I would hold back. Don Diamond refused to buy my mine with the papers once the property of Luis Lopez. I named my terms then and had them refused. Let us see if he will refuse to buy now."

The beautiful owner of the Yellow Witch Mine went into another room, the door of which she locked behind her.

When she came forth she was clad in a dress which fitted her symmetrical figure to a dot, and over her shoulders hung a rich mantilla such as often decorates the shoulders of the wealthy women of Mexico.

More than one bronzed miner stared at her when she emerged into the strong afternoon sunlight and hurried toward Don Diamond's house.

"Jehu! what takes Zeo to the major?" cried Faverell, stopping the instant he saw her and almost staring her out of countenance. "Has she taken another notion to sell her mine since losing her overseer? She'll find Don Diamond in no mood to buy. Ha, ha! Zeo. You may encounter an old acquaintance to-night, and Captain Double Fist may open his eyes when he sees you."

Zeo was watched till she passed beyond Don Diamond's door.

Those on the outside did not see her walk straight to the well-known private room.

She found it empty.

With a quick look around, she went to the table and jerked the green cord hanging above it, and then, as the face of the new man in Sejo's shoes appeared at the door, she said:

"Tell your master I am here."

And then she settled herself quietly in the chair, to wait for the gold-bug of the Yellow Hills.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ZEO DROPS A THUNDERBOLT.

ZEO did not have to wait long. She barely had time to collect her thoughts when she found herself in the presence of the man she had come to see, but who, from his looks and manner, would rather not have had her there at that moment.

Don Diamond came forward, a little flushed and with his eyes fixed on his visitor, while the owner of the Yellow Witch eyed him intently.

"I don't call often, and then only on business," she began, with a smile. "You did not take kindly to the proposition I put forward when I was here last, and I have come to renew it. The Yellow Witch is still in the market, but I have changed my price."

Finding nothing better to do, Don Diamond had taken a seat opposite his caller and met her speech with a nod.

"As you may know, I have lost my mine boss," continued Zeo.

"Captain Talbot?"

"Yes. I am quite unfortunate."

"The courts of Red Jack will take vengeance as soon as they can be put to work."

"They will be hurried up a little in this instance, eh, Major Diamond?"

"If you wish it," bowed the mine king, but he saw at once that he had made a mistake.

Zeo leaned toward him and rested one hand on the edge of the table.

"I am not vengeful," said she, with a smile.

"In fact, Talbot was not as devoted to my interests as he might have been. It is extremely hard for one to serve two masters nowadays."

"I do not comprehend."

"Ha! When did you lose your penetration?" laughed Zeo. "Come, Major Diamond; let us fight fair. The man who killed Tough Talbot, your companion for many years, did so in self-defense, for he told me—promised me on his

word of honor—that he would shed no blood here in any other manner.”

“Then you know the man?”

“He is Reynard.”

“He came back to Red Jack under false colors.”

“Yes.”

“He is suspicioned of having communicated certain things to the soldiers.”

“To the young captain who led his men away a few minutes ago?”

“No, to Captain Raymond.”

“Oh,” ejaculated Zeo falling back, “to the soldiers who were killed by the Indians in Vulture Gulch.”

There was a singular gleam in the woman's eyes as she emphasized a part of her speech.

“I believe Reynard went off with the unfortunate troop,” continued she.

“So they say.”

“Major, you have ordered the court to convict.”

Don Diamond started a little.

“I am here to be plain. You have ordered the court to convict,” repeated Zeo. “Even now the jury is being made up and the form of the verdict is being discussed. I have come hither for two things—to sell my mine and to get fair play for the man on trial for his life. Fair play in Red Jack with the machinery in the hands of Big Faverell looks almost impossible, but there must be nothing else.”

The Croesus of Dakota was inclined to laugh in the face of the woman who could talk thus in his presence when she could not command an ally in the world, but her face deterred him from indulging in any merriment just then.

“Fair play for Reynard,” she resumed. “If he shot Talbot in cold blood no hand shall fall between him and the noose. If he dropped the soldier-bater in self-defense he shall not be hanged. The testimony must be fairly taken. There are witnesses.”

“For Reynard?” asked Don Diamond in surprise.

“Why not? Is it to be presumed that nobody saw the collision? Are the men who are to come forward and swear that when they found the body no weapon was on it to have things their own way to the exclusion of the defense?”

“I thought you considered Talbot in your employ?”

“He was in it,” answered Zeo quickly. “He served me nominally while he obeyed you with zeal,” was the quick retort.

“This is a charge direct, woman!” exclaimed Don Diamond.

“I am fond of straight thrusts,” laughed Zeo. “Talbot is dead, and your court is about to convict a man in cold blood. I place myself between Reynard and the consummation of this outrage.”

He looked at the woman in blank amazement.

Never before had he seen so cool a siren.

“It seems to me that you fear what you call my court,” said he, after a pause.

“No, I fear nothing in Red Jack, major. You do not use the proper word. I apprehend injustice, premeditated and without warrant.”

“You think Reynard will not be fairly tried?”

“Not by the court as it stands organized.”

“He can't get a change of venue here.”

It seemed to give Don Diamond great delight to pronounce such words.

“He will ask for none,” replied Zeo. “Now, shall he be fairly tried?”

“He shall.”

“By the court as organized?”

“There is no other.”

“You will not let the jury be drawn after some regular form. You will not give Reynard the usual challenges.”

“That is beyond my power. The judge has that to do.”

“Who acts as judge?”

“Powers.”

“A man who owes his very life to Major Diamond!” cried Zeo. “This is the man who is to act as judge on Reynard's trial. In God's name, man, why don't you inscribe the word ‘force’ somewhere in your court-room. Tom Powers, of Sonoma, for judge! The man who was taken out of a camp one night in a coat of tar and feathers for insulting a crippled girl. This is the dispenser of Red Jack justice, is it? Let's have a little change in the programme.”

Don Diamond seemed to wince. He did not like the cutting sarcasm of the woman he dared not dismiss, but when he thought that that night she was to be taken away, he recovered some of his spirits.

“Issue an order for a jury to be struck from certain names which the prisoner and Big Faverell may select,” continued Zeo.

“I cannot. It is against the code.”

Zeo's eyes instantly sparkled, if they did not flash.

“Very well,” said she taking a long breath.

“If you utterly refuse, we will call this part of the business transacted. Now you must buy my mine.”

“I do not want it now,” answered the major.

“But you have not heard my new price.”

“It is unnecessary to mention it,” remarked Don Diamond with a wave of the hand.

“When I was here before I offered the Yellow Witch for some papers once carried in a black valise.”

The boss of Red Jack said nothing.

“I want those papers still, but I want something more,” she continued. “To-day, Don Diamond, I will give you a clear deed for every foot of the Yellow Witch in exchange for the head of the man who killed Don Lopez!”

Major Diamond changed color.

“A head is most valuable to the man who owns it,” smiled Zeo. “You will remember that when Don Lopez was found in the sage brush he had no head.”

“You have come back to the Mexican again,” laughed Major Diamond. “He was your hobby when you were here before. You seem to believe I know something about the headless man of Arizona.”

“So I do!” and Zeo left her chair and stood erect before Don Diamond, her fine figure relieved of the mantilla and her deep-black eyes glowing in the lamplight. “Give me the missing head and I will throw into your hands a clear title-deed for the Yellow Witch. I am willing to let the papers go. I want the missing head.”

For a few seconds the two occupants of the room in Don Diamond's mansion eyed one another like gladiators about to begin the tilt.

It was diamond cut diamond with the best point in Zeo's hands.

“You are master here!” she suddenly cried.

“The men who are in your employ are your object slaves. I know them all. I can read the past history of every slave under your invisible lash. You have come up from scenes of duplicity and crime, and you make money hand over fist from a starting-point which is stained with human blood. You and your vultures kill without mercy to keep a secret which you have concealed for more than six months. You do not have to ask what became of Nicholas Norway the Lost Detective. No! Don Diamond. You sit here, drink your wines and issue orders like a czar. You never look at your hands, or if you do, you fail to see on them the blood which once dripped from the missing head of Don Lopez in the sage brush of the South. You look backward now and then no doubt, but never see four blind-folded horses plunging over a precipice dragging after them a battered stage. Do you want me to draw a few scenes for you? If I am to play artist here I ask that you call in the young girl up-stairs. Let Coral enter and remain while I paint a few pictures from Don Diamond's life. What! don't you want her? I will summon her myself.”

Zeo put out her hand and it had nearly touched the bell rope when Major Diamond sprang forward and caught her arm.

“You would rather not, eh?” laughed Zeo, looking him in the eye. “Perhaps you prefer to purchase the Yellow Witch with Don Lopez's head.”

He said nothing.

“Let us compromise, major,” she resumed.

“I will do nothing of the sort.”

The determination of a thoroughly-aroused desperado had taken full possession of Don Diamond.

In his eyes he was still sole master in Red Jack. A woman should neither cow nor defeat him, and what was Zeo but a straw in his way which the hand of Faverell would remove that night?

“You will not compromise?” said Zeo, coolly.

“You will try Reynard by your packed court, and you will not purchase my mine with the bloody head of Don Luis Lopez. Major, I close all negotiations. You have had your day like the dog that bites in secret and licks his fangs in public. From this moment there is open war between us. I am Captain Reynard's pronounced friend. If you will not give me back my husband's head I will take yours if I can. Remember!”

Zeo went toward the door with her eyes riveted on the thunderstruck man at the table.

“Your husband's head?” he echoed.

“Yes—my husband's! I am the widow of Don Lopez alias Pedroz, the man whose secret the United States wanted and after which it sent Nicholas Norway its lost ferret.”

Major Diamond stared at her speechless. Another thunderbolt had fallen.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FROM THE OUTSIDE.

THUS revealed by her own words, Zeo the Enchantress stood before Major Diamond in an entirely new light.

She had ceased to be for the present both the owner of the Yellow Witch and the Woman with the Knife, and was now only the avenging widow of Don Lopez.

“Nobody here will believe the woman's story,” thought Don Diamond coming to his own rescue. “She might control her miners but we outnumber them. I will meet this woman with a bold front.”

He took a step toward Zeo as he reached this conclusion.

“I have no head to give you for your mine,” answered he. “Besides, I don't purchase bonanzas with such currency. We cannot trade, woman.”

His suddenly assumed coolness seemed to startle her.

“I shall make no further demand,” was the quick response. “You will let me say good-day, major?”

“Is there to be war between us?”

“As you say.”

“I will not pay the price you demand for the Yellow Witch. I cannot.”

“Ah! you would hold the head that rolled off in the sage brush! you intend to tighten your grip on the contents of the black valise. These resolutions constitute your title-deed to the mines you operate, do they? Major Diamond, you know that you stand on a slippery ledge and even now your court as organized out yonder is getting ready to make more secure your footing.”

Zeo was allowed to depart with no further exchange of words.

Don Diamond was glad to get rid of the woman who could play such a hand in his own house, and when her figure had vanished he downed a glass of liquor to brace his nerves and laughed in derision and triumph.

“She'll sing another song when she goes off to-night with Big Faverell!” laughed he. “Our tigress doesn't know that Captain Double Fist the hunted brigand and perhaps an old acquaintance is waiting for her. Will she attempt to interfere with the execution of Reynard? A woman of her nerve is capable of attempting anything.”

Zeo had gone back to her house on the hill. There was a crowd in front of the El Dorado and groups of dark-faced and rough-shirted men elsewhere but nowhere could she see the towering figure of Ford Faverell.

She found in one of the rooms of her mansion the same man who had brought the report of the shooting of Tough Talbot. He had been waiting for her return.

“What has happened since? Make it brief, but tell me all,” said Zeo.

“The court is ready. Powers is to preside and the jury stands prepared to convict. Faverell's hand is visible throughout the whole thing. Six men stand ready to swear that no weapons were found on Talbot's body—”

“That is enough,” interrupted Zeo, lifting a finger. “When does the court sit?”

“Within an hour.”

“On the Square?”

“Yes.”

“How well is the prisoner guarded?”

“Four men are at the shanty now.”

“None of ours?”

“Not one.”

Zeo was silent for a moment.

“Where is Faverell?”

“I left him with Powers in the back room of the El Dorado.”

At this time there stood erect near the closed door of a certain cabin in Red Jack and on the inside the man who had placed his life in the hands of the most merciless set of men that ever ran a Wild West court.

Reynard, in the small shanty which had become his prison, was as completely helpless as if he were immured in a cage of iron. His hands had been tied at his back, and the thongs cut like knives, making their way to the bone.

He knew that his story of the death of Tough Talbot would not be accepted by the men who would try him for his life, yet there was not the sign of fear visible as he leaned against the rough wall of his cramped prison.

If he meditated any coup, or if he expected help from the outside, he was apt to find failure at the end of each hope, for, with all Red Jack against him—we say “all,” counting Zeo and her influence as nothing against the power of Major Diamond—he was as surely a doomed man as ever one had been in the Wild West.

Once Reynard looked out of the window at his right and saw the Atlantean shoulders of one of his guards. In a moment the owner of the shoulders turned his face toward the cabin and the prisoner smiled.

“The man who gave the command when we started,” murmured Reynard, studying the face before him.

What did he mean?

When had the mountain guard issued a command, and he but one of Don Diamond's subordinates?

The man in the cabin seemed to take delight in studying the face through the glass. It was rough, dark and bearded, a fair sample of the faces to be seen anywhere among the bonanza hills of Dakota.

All at once it came close to the window and the eyes of the two men suddenly met with only a glass between.

The guard had evidently suddenly bethought himself of the prisoner and wanted to satisfy himself that he was still in the jaws of death. He had not expected such a confrontation and when he saw the eyes of Reynard fixed upon him he quailed despite his coolness.

"I am here, Red Robin," said Reynard through the window. "When am I to meet my accusers in open trial?"

"Things are gettin' in shape now," was the reply.

"Under Faverell's eye?"

"I believe he is managing affairs."

In spite of the poor light in the cabin the Red Jack guard saw a smile come to the corners of Reynard's lips.

"You would not come in here a moment, Red Robin?" continued the prisoner.

The guard shook his head.

"It's ag'in' orders," was his reply.

"Against Don Diamond's commands?"

"I don't know."

The following moment Red Robin drew off and walked out of hearing distance, as if determined that the prisoner's voice should not tempt him from duty.

"Bound to Don Diamond with the rest," muttered Reynard. "The whole camp has been fashioned in one mold. I could have told Red Robin something that would have opened his eyes, but I did not choose to do so. So the court is getting ready and under Big Faverell's eye. Anybody conversant with Red Jack affairs knows what that means. I see—"

Reynard broke his own sentence with startling abruptness, and for the next few seconds looked at the man who was talking with Red Robin whose burly figure was stationed between him and the cabin.

"When did he come back?" asked Reynard, and as there was no one near enough to answer, him he could only look and wonder.

The man on the outside whose return had astonished the prisoner was Solid Sam Sarcy the guide who had conducted Raymond's ill-fated party over the mountains from Fort Meade.

"If he had stayed here perhaps the massacre would not have taken place," continued the prisoner in thought. "I am sure that Solid Sam had no hand in the infamous game. By Jove! I believe the man is drunk—a strange state of being for the scout."

Raymond was confirmed in his observations by the actions of the man who was talking to Red Robin.

"Can't see the prisoner, eh?" ejaculated the scout with the air of a man sadly under the influence of frontier liquor. "Don't I want 'em ter stretch his neck if he shot Tough Talbot or anybody else? What's the use o' foolin' with the galoot? What's yer court an' jury?"

Sarcy made a staggering effort to approach the cabin, but Red Robin threw up his hands to keep him off.

"Lemme go!" cried the scout breaking away from the guard. "Don't you see I'm all right? I'm with the majority, I am."

In spite of Red Robin's remonstrance he managed to get clear of him and the next second came toward the shanty with the motions of a thoroughly drunken man.

In a moment he fell crash against the logs at the window where he reeled to and fro in a vain effort to steady himself, all the while watched by Red Robin with a grin of disgust and contempt on his face.

Reynard was at the window when the scout fell against it with all his force. He had not had time to get out of the way, and even if he wanted to avoid the drunkard's gaze, he was held spell-bound by the mention of his name.

"Reynard, are you there?" came in from the outside in the steadiest of tones. "Don't give up if they have packed the thing against you. I am here. Sam Sarcy and some one else stand between you and death. We are going to avenge the boys in Vulture Gulch! Don't let 'em cow you for a moment."

Word followed word in rapid succession, each one fastening the thrill of hope on Reynard, and when the warning was finished Sarcy reeled from the window with a maudlin laugh and made a crooked path toward Red Robin who had not ceased to eye him.

"Hang 'im if that's what he deserves, an' I guess he does from what I've heard!" exclaimed the scout. "You wouldn't like a draught o' Red Star lightnin', eh, Cap'n Robin?"

Captain Robin rejected Sarcy's invitation with a wave of the hand and a rapid glance toward the other guards who were having a three-handed game a few feet away, and the scout walked off a little unsteady to disappear a short distance from the scene.

"She said they wouldn't let me reach him!" laughed Solid Sam, the air of the sot leaving him in an instant. "I guess I've played Bacchus before, good enough to hoodwink such fellows as Red Robin, at any rate. So they are about ready, are they?—Got the court organized even to the verdict. We will see. There is more behind Reynard of Red Jack than the conspirators think. The secret, to keep which they have killed without mercy, is apt to get out before they hang the man they've got in their trap!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SOLID SAM AND ZEO.

NOBODY seemed to concern himself particularly over the return of Solid Sam, the well-known scout and guide.

Sarcy had a habit of turning up at odd intervals, and he was likely to show himself in camp when he was thought to be far away.

That he should turn up somewhat intoxicated, was the strangest part of the affair, and when he let out that he had heard of the massacre of Raymond and his men, and was for the immediate punishment of the Indians who had perpetrated the outrage, several listeners looked at one another and smiled significantly.

Solid Sam ventilated his ideas in the bar-room of the El Dorado after his visit to Raymond's prison. He had an approving, though rather boisterous crowd for his hearers, and he left no doubt on their minds as to the guilt of the Indians.

No one thought that the cunning scout might not be playing drunk, and when Big Faverell and "Judge" Powers came in from the back room where they had been perfecting the arrangements for Reynard's trial, Sam was treating the crowd to some of the worst whisky in the Yellow Hills.

The Giant of Red Jack saw the scout at once, and the next moment he and his companion were invited to "walk up" with the rest and "take suthin'."

After awhile Sam was permitted to saunter out and vanish.

He had learned that the hour for assembling court was four o'clock, and though he departed soon after this announcement, it did not seem to hasten his departure.

Solid Sam went by a roundabout way to Zeo's residence. He went in by the back door and unexpectedly encountered the owner of the Yellow Witch bonanza in the hall.

Zeo went to the wall with a slight cry at sight of the scout, no longer with the foolish leer of the drunkard in his eyes, but himself once more.

"I thought you were far away!" exclaimed Zeo whose face had received a glow of pleasure.

"I wasn't very far," replied the scout. "I turn up when somebody wishes I was in Tartarus. You know what has happened, and you know, too, what is to be done."

Zeo said "I know" and then grasped Sarcy's sleeve.

"But it must not be done!" cried she. "I have just played my hand—"

"You? Where did you play it?"

"At Don Diamond's."

"What did you do?"

Back from the eyes which were fastened on her shrunk Zeo the Enchantress, and Solid Sam following her up with a quick step repeated his question right in her face.

"I offered to sell my mine for a head!" said Zeo.

"For a head? Whose head?"

"Solid Sam, you ought to be able to guess if you remember what you told me once concerning your recollections of Southern Arizona. You know who lost his head down there."

"Oho! you refer to Don Lopez!" cried he.

"I do."

"And you offered to sell the Yellow Witch to Don Diamond for the head of the Mexican who was found in the sage bush with nothing on his shoulders?"

"I did."

The scout fell back with a laugh.

"What did he say?"

"He refused to buy."

"On what grounds?"

"He said he did not possess the head."

"He probably told the truth, Zeo."

"I think he did."

Sarcy was silent for a moment.

"Did you tell him how Don Lopez's head came to interest you so much?" he suddenly asked.

"I finally did."

"You could not keep the secret, eh?" laughed Solid Sam. "You women are all alike."

"He set my blood on fire!" cried Zeo, her eyes seeming to blaze. "It may have been a mistake, but no power could have chained my tongue. Major Diamond was told that the wife of the headless Mexican stood before him, and with that I left him."

"Probably not a moment too soon," smiled Sarcy. "Having played your hand in the face of what has happened in Red Jack—having played it and lost—what is the next move?"

"I want to save the man to be tried for his life."

"Reynard?"

"Reynard."

"The court will open in thirty minutes."

"I know it. With 'Judge' Powers on the bench, with twelve men of their own selection and Big Faverell for high sheriff, you know what is to take place."

"I know what the programme is."

"It is death!"

"Well, how were you going to change the verdict?"

Zeo made no reply.

"Had you fixed on no plan?" continued the scout.

"I had one in my mind, but—"

"You abandoned it as futile, eh?"

"I have let it go," said the woman, sadly.

"Would you acquaint me with the plan?"

"It was as foolish as desperate," answered Zeo.

"Its very desperateness may commend it."

"No—not my last resort," exclaimed Zeo.

"It was this: I was going back to Don Diamond, and at the muzzle of my revolver I intended to draw from him an order for the release of Reynard of Red Jack."

Solid Sam looked amazed at the woman before him.

"It was a desperate plan sure enough," said he.

"It seemed to set my brain in a blaze," replied Zeo. "I forced myself to take a cooler second thought, and my blood was losing its heat when you came."

"You are interested in the strange man of Red Jack," continued Sarcy. "For months Reynard has been somewhat of a mystery here. He came to Red Jack soon after the disappearance of Nicholas Norway, Uncle Sam's detective, and nobody has been able to find him out. Once or twice I have caught him where he ought not to have been as the mine boss of the Chained Tiger, and then again I have seen him miles from here alone in the mountains. Do you know what I have sometimes thought in connection with Reynard?"

Zeo slowly shook her head, but kept her eyes fixed on the scout.

"He knows something about the secret of the conspirators," continued Solid Sam. "Reynard of Red Jack has a double life. He knows more than one dreams about the Lost Detective. Why do you start, Zeo?"

Solid Sam was within three feet of the bonanza queen, and he saw that fleeing color had left her face perceptibly white.

"The man knows. Don't say nay, woman," he went on. "Reynard of Red Jack has a secret like the rest of them. You want to save him because he has a secret. You will be asking me to help you save him by and by. I don't care particularly what his secret is. I don't ask you to divulge that which you may be sworn to keep."

"I am sworn to keep nothing," was the response. "I know that Reynard is a man with a dual life. He knows that the stage which carried the United States detective out of Cut-throat Canyon six months ago was run off a precipice by four blindfolded horses, and—"

"Enough!" cried Sarcy, putting out his hand in a gesture of silence. "Don't tell me another word, Zeo. I put this and that together, and bring two pieces of a chain together. I am no detective, but I can reason like the detective does sometimes. It can't be over twenty minutes now till the opening of the packed court. I must not sober off entirely in that time," the scout laughed. "I managed to tell him that he was not friendless on the outside. I must keep my word. You need not try your play on Don Diamond. The time is too short, anyhow. The sentence of the court will be death, and Tough Talbot will be avenged within twenty minutes after adjournment. It is a swift tribunal, organized to sweep from Don Diamond's path the most dangerous man on it now."

"They must not do it!" exclaimed Zeo.

"How are you going to prevent?" quietly asked the scout.

"I don't know," admitted the woman, and then her eyes brightened with a flash as she caught Sarcy's glance. "Step between him and the noose! save Reynard of Red Jack from the vengeance of Don Diamond and his death angels, and I will throw my mine at your feet! You won't, ha? You don't want to risk your life, I see. Well, why should you? The man is really nothing to you. He is all to me."

"To you, Zeo?" cried Sarcy, seeing the woman blushing as if she had unwittingly thrown out a secret.

"It is told! Yes, he is all to me!" she answered. "If you have no plan by which there is a chance of saving him, I will play Zeo's last desperate hand. He shot Tough Talbot in self-defense. He carries on his breast now the mark of the soldier-hater's knife. Talbot, as Don Diamond's spy, though my mine boss, followed him into the depths of the Yellow Witch where, after hearing certain secrets, he attempted Reynard's life. If he had not killed the wretch I should have been tempted to do the deed myself. Look yonder, Solid Sam. The packed court is assembling on the Square."

Zeo had stepped to a window and was holding aside a curtain which permitted the scout to have a view of the Square of Red Jack.

He saw a crowd of men at one side, and knew what it meant.

"If you will not make an attempt another will," suddenly said the voice of Zeo at his side.

The curtain fell back, and the fair owner of the Yellow Witch Mine opened a drawer in the table near the window.

"Once I played a cool hand with this and won!" she said, through set teeth, taking from the drawer a silver-mounted revolver. "I wasn't Zeo the Enchantress then; but never mind. The same hand may win again."

CHAPTER XXIX.

REYNARD'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

If there was ever a packed court it was the one by which Reynard of Red Jack was to be tried for his life.

"Judge" Powers was a man with a smattering of law, but he seldom exercised justice when his prejudices were against the prisoner. He was as much a tool of Don Diamond's creation as were the rest of the nabob's satellites, and it was known before the trial commenced that in his tribunal Reynard would have no show.

A few minutes before the hour set for the opening of the court Big Faverell received a folded paper which was sealed.

When he opened it he read:

"Zeo has just been here again. She declared herself before she went away. She is the wife of Don Lopez. D. D."

A smile passed over Faverell's face as he looked up.

"Played another hand, eh?" he exclaimed. "Well, it is her last. To-night she goes to Captain Double Fist her future jailer, and we get a firm grip on the Yellow Witch Bonanza."

Meantime the court had assembled.

The guards had been ordered to conduct the prisoner to the tribunal, and he was expected every moment.

With the assumption which was one of his chief characteristics "Judge" Powers, over whose mouth drooped an enormous red mustache, had selected the names of those from among whom a jury was to be drawn.

Not one of them belonged to Zeo's party of miners, but all were in Don Diamond's employ, and consequently the creatures of the court.

Reynard came forward with a steady step. There was a haughtiness in his look which told all that he had a supreme contempt for the tribunal as it had been organized.

He knew what it meant with "Judge" Powers on the bench and Ford Faverell as high sheriff. He knew that the drawing of the jury would prove a farce, and that the names of those to be selected were already known to the conspirators.

A pair of tables had been transferred from the El Dorado to the Square and back of them on a raised platform sat the judge of this august tribunal.

As Reynard was conducted into the ring before the tables with his hands tied behind him as they had been ever since his arrest, "Judge" Powers spoke.

"The prisoner having arrived, this court is open for business. The sheriff will proceed to draw the jury in the usual manner."

"The usual manner" meant that the names of thirty-six men on thirty-six bits of paper would be placed in a hat on one of the tables, and that some one would draw out twelve, one after another.

Big Faverell stepped in front of the judge's bench and proceeded to place in his own hat the names previously prepared.

Having done this he called from the crowd a man who stepped briskly forward and was told to draw the jury. Reynard of Red Jack looked on without a remonstrance.

One after another Faverell called the names of the drawn as they were handed to him for that purpose, and each juror as he was called stepped forward in full view of all.

"Swear the jury," said Powers.

This proceeding brought a smile to the prisoner's lips, especially when the twelve were sworn to bring in a verdict "just and true," and according to the law and the testimony.

After this there stepped to the front a little man with a pompous air. He had an eye that drooped considerably, and a crescent-shaped scar on one of his cheeks did not improve his beauty.

This was Dan Lynx, the attorney for Red Jack, whenever one was wanted. He now appeared "for the commonwealth, for law and justice," as he phrased it, and his vindictiveness and merciless prosecution had made him famous beyond the domain of the Yellow Hills.

He made the usual "statement" to the jury. He told how they would prove that the prisoner had taken Tough Talbot's life without a show of self-defense, that Reynard was a man inimical to the prosperity of Red Jack, and that he had come back to camp in disguise after having voluntarily left it.

This done, Reynard was asked to plead to the indictment already found, and he did so in a ringing voice which pronounced the words:

"Not guilty!"

The court smiled and looked at Faverell, and the members of the jury exchanged glances which failed to indicate surprise.

Reynard started forward when the name of the first witness was called.

The man came forward and faced the court.

He gave in testimony which was not unexpected to any who heard. He claimed to have been the first man to reach Talbot after the shot. Smoke was still issuing from Reynard's revolver.

He had examined Talbot to see if he possessed any weapon when shot, but found none.

At this juncture Reynard of Red Jack

moved for the first time since his arrival in court.

He walked toward the witness and caught the man's eye with a look that made him quail.

"I claim the right to question the witnesses," said he, with a glance at "Judge" Powers.

"Take it," snapped that worthy, like a man confident of the result. "The witness will answer no impertinent questions, and the court reserves the right to pass on the relevancy of all asked."

A smile of derision wreathed Reynard's lips, and with his eyes riveted upon the witness, he began:

"You saw the meeting, did you?"

"I did."

"You witnessed the shooting?"

"I saw it all."

"Where were you?"

"I stood at the door of my shanty,"

"Three doors from the El Dorado, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you know that Tough Talbot never went without a revolver?"

"I know that he possessed a weapon."

"Don't you know, too, that one hour before the shooting he took it apart in your house and cleaned it on your table?"

The witness flinched and threw an appealing look toward Powers.

There was no interference.

"You have not answered me," continued Reynard, holding the man with his eyes as a trap does a fox.

"I know nothing of the proceedings you mention," said the witness, firmly.

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

The confidence of the witness seemed to increase with his denial.

"I cannot allow the witness to be badgered in a manner that reflects upon his veracity," said "Judge" Powers at this juncture.

Reynard turned squarely upon him.

"I shall not badger the witness. When a man finds his life at stake he fights hard. I am fighting for mine. Hold! I am not done with you, Tom Tucson."

The witness stopped with a growl and looked at Reynard.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You have sworn positively on the point in dispute. There was no revolver on Tough Talbot's person when he fell?"

"None."

"Have you ever testified in cases of this sort before?"

The witness flinched again, but the eyes of Reynard of Red Jack were on him and held him to the rack.

"What bearing does this question have on the case at issue?" came from the court.

"I want to show that the witness is an old hand at this business—that this is not his first appearance in a case of this kind."

"Judge" Powers settled back in his chair, and Tucson's eyes glared savagely at him.

"Now speak the truth," said Reynard. "You have testified similarly in cases like the present one before to-day."

"I don't remember where."

"Call up your life in Colorado. Remind yourself of the famous shooting affair of Camp Coyote. It was your testimony which condemned a man named Captain Chestnut. You found no weapon on the body of the captain's victim, thus destroying the plea of self-defense. Afterward when it was clearly shown that your testimony had been secured for the sum of twenty dollars, you were driven out of camp—"

"There!" thundered "Judge" Powers. "This thing must stop where it is."

Reynard paid no attention to the mandate. His lips met firmly, and his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

"Do you deny this?" he exclaimed, leaning toward Tom Tucson. "Do you also deny that five years later in Rattlesnake City at the foot of the Quartz Hills you—"

"Stop the prisoner, Mr. Sheriff!" interrupted Powers.

"Let him fight for his life with his own weapons!" rung out a voice which made one-half of the crowd turn, and to the astonishment of every one, Solid Sam Sarcy, the scout, came forward, his step steady and no sign of a drunkard about him.

"I say give the prisoner at the bar a show," he continued, facing "Judge" Powers. "Let him prove, if he can, the bad character of the witnesses against him. If he can convict them out of their own mouths, well and good. Does Red Jack justice mean the throttling of a man's rights? If the prisoner wants evidence bearing on Tom Tucson's past, let him call me!"

There was a sensation immediately following the scout's words.

The witness glared at him through his lowering brows, and the face of the Court grew dark. "I answer nothing!" grated Tucson, through his yellow teeth, as he turned away with clinched hands.

"Call the next witness!" said the judge.

Reynard and Solid Sam exchanged glances as the voice of Faverell called:

"Max Markham!"

The following moment the owner of the name came forward, and Sarcy, with a look at him for a second, leaned toward the prisoner and said:

"Let me deal with this suborned villain."

CHAPTER XXX.

A SENSATION IN COURT.

MARKHAM was one of the best known men of Red Jack. During Reynard's cross-examination of Tom Tucson he had glowered fiercely at the prisoner, and now he came forward with a defiant gleam in the depths of his eyes.

Dan Lynx, the attorney for the prosecution, began at once with the witness.

His eagerness said plainly that there was to be no more delays.

The sun was nearing the mountain and ere long the summer day would vanish.

Markham had been called to corroborate Tucson's evidence. He, too, had searched Tough Talbot immediately after the shooting, but had found no weapons on the body.

He gave in his testimony with numerous glances toward Reynard, and when Dan Lynx said "Take the witness," he drew his burly figure up and smiled grimly.

Solid Sam stepped toward Markham instead of Reynard.

The eyes of the two men met instantly.

"Do you pose as the prisoner's attorney, Captain Sarcy?" asked "Judge" Powers.

"You may view me in that capacity," was the answer.

The judge fell back and said, with a wave of the hand:

"Proceed, but make it brief. Lots o' work ahead."

The command did not seem to hurry Sam in the least.

"When did the shooting occur?" he asked Markham.

"I've told the jury once," snapped the witness.

"You adhere to your statement, eh?"

"Look hyer, Solid Sam," he cried. "You can't badger me. I've been in court afore, and I know my rights without appealin' to the judge."

"So you do," quietly retorted Sarcy, whose temper remained unruffled. "You are positive that the shooting occurred at the hour you have mentioned, that shortly thereafter you reached the spot, and with Tucson searched the clothes of the man already dead?"

"I've sworn to all this and I don't—"

He caught "Judge" Powers's eye at this juncture and stopped.

"May it please the court," said the scout, turning to the florid dispenser of Dakota justice, "I desire to impeach the witness."

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd. Markham bit his lip and turned all sorts of colors, the judge got redder than ever even to the roots of his hair, and Faverell glared at Sarcy with the eye of a tiger.

Markham threw up a clinched hand and let free a terrible oath.

"Nobody impeaches me!" he exclaimed. "By the eternal One! I will stand nothing of the kind. I'm no common liar. What do you mean, Captain Sarcy?"

Sarcy, the scout, seemed to enjoy the man's anger. He looked at him with a placid smile at the corners of his mouth, and let him have his spasm out.

"Let him do it," suddenly shouted Markham to the judge. "Let him impeach me if he can! I want to see the hand they're goin' to play. Sail in, Solid Sam. You want to be sure o' your game, though."

Sarcy glanced at Judge Powers now conversing with Dan Lynx in low tones.

"Call your impeaching witnesses if you have any," said Powers to Sarcy.

Markham had folded his arms and was standing erect in the center of the open court-room. He courted the fray; he seemed to see in it Sarcy's overthrow and victory for himself.

"I would call Zeo," said the scout.

Zeo!

The name went from lip to lip.

Markham fell back a step but recovered in a second and pronounced the word in accents of derision.

"Call Zeo," "Judge" Powers said to Faverell and the next moment the strong voice of the high sheriff called the owner of the Yellow Witch Mine.

There was no response for Zeo was not in court, and a messenger was dispatched to her house.

"What does the Enchantress know?" asked Reynard when Sarcy had fallen back to where he stood while the court waited for the woman.

"More than you think," was the reply.

"But the court will not believe her testimony. Do you expect to make a jury like the one yonder disagree?"

Sarcy looked at the twelve bronzed men a few feet away and studied the group for a few seconds.

"It is the only hope," whispered he. "I know that the jury belongs to Don Diamond as

much as if he held a title deed to the soul of each man, but notwithstanding this there's a chance."

"Which man of the twelve is weak?"

"Three of them are."

"But not weak enough to betray Don Diamond on his own ground."

"We shall see. Zeo has more than one slave in Red Jack."

"More than one lover, you mean?"

"It's all the same," smiled Sarcy. "Three of the members of your jury belong to the list of those captured by her dark eyes and her mine. Can't you pick them out now, Reynard? Can't you see that three of them are uneasy over the prospect of Zeo's coming into court?"

Reynard the Strange was studying the twelve faces when the crowd parted on his right and the superb figure of Zeo the Enchantress appeared to all.

The Queen of the Yellow Witch had a proud bearing that instantly caught the eyes of every one. She looked at "Judge" Powers with a nod which was returned and when she came toward Sarcy and his client Dan Lynx put his head between Faverell and the court and whispered:

"You see the scheme, gentlemen. The jury is to be attacked by beauty. Four men on it are known lovers of the woman who has been called. But wait. I'll break the force of her testimony with a word when she's done. I've crushed women in court before to-day. I rather like the business," and Dan Lynx drew back and turned toward the little group of three not far away.

Meantime Markham the witness had nursed his wrath till he was almost black in the face.

"Proceed, Captain Sarcy," suddenly said the court, and Zeo stepped back and solemnly raised her hand.

Faverell swore her in a voice strangely unlike his own.

He now saw the woman in a new light. She was no longer Zeo of Red Jack but the wife of Don Lopez of Arizona, the man who years ago lost his head in the sage bush.

"Curse her!" thought Faverell. "Why didn't I know all this before?"

Zeo stood before the jury and facing Sarcy on whose lips the first question was already trembling. A deep hush had fallen over the Dakota court.

"Madam Zeo, do you know the witness?" asked the scout.

The Bonanza Queen turned her eyes full on Markham.

"I know him," said she.

"How long have you known him?"

"Fifteen years."

Markham started.

"Not all the time in Red Jack?" continued Sarcy.

"No."

"Give the jury an outline of your acquaintance with the witness."

Markham's eyes flashed.

"I thought I was to be impeached!" cried he.

"What has my past life to do with my testimony here? I appeal to the court for protection."

The idea of a man standing six feet in his stockings, a regular Ajax in physique, appealing for protection from a woman, was enough to send a smile through the crowd which looked on.

Markham was on a red-hot toasting-fork, and he lost his tongue so badly that he stammered in his appeal.

The court came to his aid.

"Captain Sarcy must confine his witness to the direct impeachment," decided "Judge" Powers. "We cannot bring up any one's past here."

"Very well," answered the scout. "It seems that the past is quite disagreeable to a number of gentlemen in court. We will come to the present, your Honor."

He turned to Zeo again.

"Now, Madam Zeo, where were you at the hour the shooting of Talbot is said to have taken place?"

"In my office in the Yellow Witch Mine."

"Alone?"

"No, sir, not alone."

"Who occupied the office with you?"

"Max Markham."

This answer dropped like a blazing bomb before the whole court.

Markham raised his clinched fist again, but Sarcy's voice got ahead of him.

"Keep still. Madam Zeo is on the stand now," cried the scout, and then he turned to the bonanza queen.

"Are you sure the witness was in your mine at the time of the killing?" resumed Sarcy.

"I am."

"Did you quit the mine together?"

"No, I left first."

"Was that after the shooting?"

"It was."

"Now, Madam Zeo, tell the jury what brought Max Markham to the Yellow Witch."

"Don't you intend to protect me?" roared the big man, whirling upon "Judge" Powers who was asfounded as his countenance showed. "I

won't stand a scheme of this sort. I guess I have a few rights—"

"We'll give you all you're entitled to," interrupted Solid Sam.

"Judge" Powers did not rule on the question of the further protection of Markham, and Zeo went on:

"Max Markham came to me with a proposition," said she, facing the twelve men on the ground. "He offered to sell me two secrets."

"It is infamous!" thundered Markham, writhing like a toasted serpent. "I won't listen to a conspiracy put on foot to ruin me—to make me the scorn of Red Jack. If the court won't protect its witnesses, I'll shake the dust off my feet and bid it farewell."

With fire in his eyes, he walked away, but the crowd did not part to let him out.

"Let your witness proceed," said "Judge" Powers to Sarcy.

Markham stopped and turned his head.

"Do you mean that, judge?" cried he, and his voice had all the elements of a hiss of hate.

"Do you desert a fellow in that style after all your coaching? Madam Zeo need not speak another word. I admit beforehand all she is going to say. I can give blow for blow. When I am betrayed I generally scotch the traitor. Gentlemen of the jury," he took two great strides toward the twelve, and halting before them, dramatically threw up his hand. "Gentlemen, know you, on Max Markham's solemn oath, that it's all a piece of conspiracy against Reynard, the prisoner. I wasn't near when the shootin' occurred. I was elsewhere, and there are half a dozen men who know that when Talbot was killed he had a cocked revolver in his hand. There's the solemn truth! The men who have just deserted me in your presence made me a witness for the State when I knew better than I swore. There, Judge Powers! you have the answer o' Markham o' Red Jack. You promised to protect me; but you've deserted me like a dog!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

FAVERELL AND HIS PLEDGE.

It was all over.

The sun had gone down on Red Jack, and there had been no hanging.

The cold-blooded farce of a trial had ended with the sensational episode of Markham's turning on his masters who had refused to protect him from Zeo's blistering truths.

"Judge" Powers pretended to see that the case of Reynard had been grossly misrepresented, and he had instructed the very jury which had been organized to convict to bring in a verdict of "not guilty."

This being done, the trial ended, and the man whose head was in the noose for hours was once more free, but still in the house of his enemies.

Don Diamond heard of this unexpected finish with lowering brows and a succession of curses.

He railed against Zeo to Faverell and the judge who had called to explain the whys and wherefores of the disappointing affair, and ordered that Markham be instantly dealt with according to the secret and unwritten code of Red Jack.

"The man is not in camp," said Powers.

"He left immediately after the trial."

"Got off, did he?" roared the major. "And yet he went to Zeo to sell her two secrets! Do you know what they were?"

"I think I could guess," answered Faverell.

"So can I," responded Don Diamond. "Don't you think he'll keep them for sale elsewhere? The man is dangerous."

The Nabob of Red Jack was silent for a moment.

"After the trial, what?" he suddenly exclaimed, looking at his guests.

"We are awaiting orders."

"Captain Faverell, you know what you are to do to-night. The viper that hissed to-day in open court must be permitted to hiss no more. She goes away—away to the cage already prepared for her! The man is left. No! there are two of them, and I don't know but that the heaviest blow should fall on Solid Sam who planned the game that beat you, judge."

Powers looked sour.

"I don't like him and I'm only waiting for a chance to get even," said he. "I got out of the snap the best I could. After the sensation produced by Zeo's testimony and Markham's madness, I had to let the prisoner off—for the present. Major, you must not lose confidence in your judge. You may need him yet."

This conversation took place in Don Diamond's private room.

Night was settling down over Red Jack, and the arrows of darkness were falling from the sky far above the golden hills.

Everywhere groups of rough-looking men discussed the events which were fresh in the minds of all.

For once Don Diamond's packed jury had failed to convict. It had cleared a man whose life had been decided on by the master of the mines, and Reynard was at large with the blood of Tough Talbot, the soldier-hater, on his hands.

A theme of this sort was enough to prevent

the usual games that went on nightly at the El Dorado and kindred places.

What was to happen next?

All agreed that an issue of some kind was joined between Zeo and Don Diamond.

The rivals of Red Jack had fairly crossed swords in a bitter contest, and in the first encounter the woman had won.

Big Faverell left the major's mansion with a cold gleam in his big black orbs. "Judge" Powers remained behind, probably to linger over the wine on the gold-bug's table, but more likely to receive certain instructions through which victory was to be wrenched from defeat.

Faverell went to his cabin and armed himself. Then he proceeded to Don Diamond's stables, and took therefrom two horses which he found already saddled.

He led the steeds to the southernmost suburbs of Red Jack, and left them among the congregated shadows while he turned back.

The time had come for him to keep his promise with Captain Double Fist, the ex-bandit.

Faverell went up the hill to Zeo's house.

The home of the bonanza queen loomed up before him like a great deserted house, silent in the night. As he neared the door a figure rose in his path, then another and another, till he was surrounded by eight stalwarts of mountain and mine.

"How is the coast?" whispered the Ajax of Red Jack.

"It is clear. Zeo is alone. No one has left the house since she came back from the trial."

A smile expressed Big Faverell's approval of the situation, and a moment later the nine men crept to the very door of the house, and all but one dropped to the ground.

The man erect knocked on the door.

The knock was followed by footsteps beyond the portal, then it opened.

Zeo herself stood before the Red Jack tough.

"What is it?"

"Can you join Reynard at the mine?" asked the man, putting one foot forward.

"At the Yellow Witch?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Right away."

With the last word the man at the door darted straight at Zeo, and at the same time those on the ground sprung up.

The Queen of Red Jack was seized before she could comprehend the nature of the assault, and in a second she was helpless in the grip of as many hands as could grasp her.

She was gagged by an ingenious contrivance and taken down the hill without touching the ground.

It was a swift journey to the horses left by Faverell in the shadows of night, and Zeo found herself lifted to the saddle of one and held there while unseen hands secured her feet to the stirrups.

Her hands were left free enough to handle the lines placed in them, and she saw that a lariat reached from her own steed's bit to the saddle on her left.

"Now, let's go," said a voice, the sound of which made Zeo start, for it had not been heard since the trial on the Square.

A number of dark figures fell back, and then the horses started forward. Zeo's brain swam wildly for a few moments.

She had been abducted for a purpose, and as she rode along she associated it with her interference with "Judge" Powers's cut-and-dried court. But Zeo did not know the real cause, and the night was too dark to enable her to see her companion.

It was a strange ride through the night, and the beautiful owner of the Yellow Witch could only guess where it would end, for the gag effectually prevented her from pronouncing a word.

On the other hand, Zeo's conductor, a big fellow, who filled the large saddle of his horse, was watching her like a hawk watches his captured mouse at night. His left hand gripped his bridle-rein, while the other rested on his hip like a hand ready for an emergency of any kind.

He seemed to enjoy his study of the figure fairly in his power, and for several hours the ride was conducted in silence beyond the sound of the horses' hoofs on the mountain trail.

All at once he leaned toward Zeo and broke out into a light laugh.

"A truce to this silence. What's a companionship if one cannot talk?"

The next instant his hand touched Zeo's face, and in a jiffy the obnoxious gag was removed.

An exclamation of joy came from the prisoner's throat.

"It was well done, Captain Faverell," said she, bending across the little space between the horses, and fixing her eyes upon the man on the other side.

"By Jove! I thought you'd have to compliment me," smiled the giant. "You were not roughly treated, Zeo."

"No; the tiger shows only his velvet sometimes," was the quick retort, and then she fell back and straightened in her saddle.

"You dare not explain this indignity!" she continued.

"Why not, Zeo?" laughed Faverell. "Don't you see that it is only one of the bands of this deep and manysided mountain game?"

"I see that even here in the dark. You didn't like my interference to-day, but that is not the prime cause of this night play. No, Captain Faverell. You serve your old master with a blind zeal. Talbot did the same but Talbot is dead and you dared not convict the man who sent the villain to his last account. I thought 'Judge' Powers's court feared nothing, and yet a woman broke it up."

Faverell seemed to wince under Zeo's words and look.

"It wasn't that so much," retorted he. "We have Reynard in our power still, and so we could afford to be merciful for the time. Markham did unstring the judge's nerves with his denunciation, but Don Diamond's liquor has turned them up again, and he is the Jeffreys of Red Jack once more. You are Don Lopez's wife, I am told."

"No, his widow, Faverell," corrected Zeo. "I am Zeo no longer, for why should I be? I offered to sell the Yellow Witch to your master for my husband's lost head, but he would not purchase. He is buying with other coin now, but let him beware lest he pay in the end the price of the life he values so highly. Does he think that the secret of Don Lopez's death can be kept alongside of the mystery of Uncle Sam's detective, or the secret of the massacre in Vulture Gulch?"

"What do you mean, woman?"

"Come, Faverell, right bower of Don Diamond and full partner of the Man of Red Jack!" cried Zeo. "I don't talk in riddles to you. I know that four blindfolded horses dragged a stage over a canyon wall, that Captain Raymond and his men died at the hands of human tigers in white skins. Yes, you don't want to let Zeo slip through your hands, but whether she does or not, the hand of a sleepless Nemesis will soon fall upon the head of every villain concerned in those three great crimes. And the gold of Red Jack will be spattered with their guilty blood!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

READY FOR THE THROW.

THOUGH saved from the tender mercies of "Judge" Powers's court, Reynard of Red Jack was still a marked man.

Major Diamond was not the person to let a man of his notoriety remain in his path when he had at his command the means for disposing of him as certainly as the packed court would have done but for Solid Sam's play aided by Zeo.

While Big Faverell was conducting the fair owner of the Yellow Witch Mine over the mountain road, Reynard and Sarcy sat in the luxuriously-furnished office of the underground bonanza.

They knew nothing of the successful abduction, and Zeo did not occupy any part of their conversation.

Reynard had just finished drawing on the table, which was almost entirely covered by a piece of white paper, a tortuous trail in black. It had many zigzag lines, with stars and crosses at intervals along the way, and the scout and guide was studying it with great surprise and curiosity.

"You've back-tracked a great many times," at last smiled Sarcy, looking up into Reynard's face. "One would never think that what you have drawn was the trail of Nick Norway the Lost Detective."

"Right you are," was the response. "Here Don Lopez was lost for awhile, and the dog on his track nearly gave him up," and Reynard's forefinger rested on a certain portion of the diagram. "Here again he disappeared, but turned up again with his bonanza secret in his head, and Uncle Sam's detective at his heels. You may imagine my surprise when I suddenly came across Don Lopez in the sage-bush of Arizona, headless and freshly murdered."

"It must have startled you."

"That word does not do the subject justice. I had followed the Mexican month after month, now sleeping under the same blanket with him and now on a faint trail. After all this ceaseless tracking, I found his headless corpse near Lariat City. Then I stepped upon the trail of his murderers, those human shadows of whom I have told you—the three men who wanted the secret so desired by the Government. I was on the hunt when I stepped into the stage at Cut-throat Canyon and found myself ticketed to Red Jack. I was prepared for a foe, for I knew that the men I wanted were the most desperate of human beings. Was Lopez's secret yielding them anything? Had they found the Mexican's bonanzas, or were they still chasing a golden myth with the blood of Don Lopez on their hands?"

"With Whistling Davy on the box of the stage I felt almost certain of a safe landing in Red Jack. We bowled over the rough trail mile after mile, until we reached the wildest part where a word and a look from Davy placed me on the alert. The following moment a volley was fired in my face as it were, and bullets from Winchesters crashed through the vehicle,

Drawing my revolver as a dark object which was the corpse of Whistling Davy shot past me to the ground, I made ready to meet the enemy. Then I saw that the way was blocked by a number of masked men, each of whom held a rifle at his shoulder. I was called on to throw up my hands or be shot to pieces. The rascals had me completely at their mercy, and every Winchester in the gang was trained at my head. Thus situated and menaced, I surrendered, and in a second found myself in the clutches of the mountain masks.

"The stage was searched and a number of eager hands went through my garments. I was then sailing under the name of Margood, a gentleman on the look-out for a claim, but I was soon shown that my real character and mission were known to some of my captors. In a little while I was bound and thrown to the bottom of the stage, the bleeding corpse of Whistling Davy was placed alongside, and the journey again resumed. Night coming on wrapped the weird mountain scenery in shadow, and all at once the stage was turned from the main road and taken into a wild, out-of-the-way district. I thought the trip was never going to end. At last a halt was made, and the horses were blindfolded. I saw ahead in the moonlight the brink of a canyon precipice, and in a flash the devilish intentions of the masked villains became apparent. I was helpless and fully at their mercy. All at once at a loud 'Now!' from the lips of the giant leader of the gang, the horses were struck on every side with stinging whips, and with snorts of pain they plunged forward, dragging me to almost certain destruction. Suddenly I felt the stage and animals falling downward, a confused mass, the horses struggling in the air and everything topsy-turvy in the vehicle.

"We seemed an age making the descent, yet I am certain now that we could not have occupied two seconds. The striking was a terrible crash, which knocked me senseless, and rendered everything as dark as Egypt. I know not how long I remained the victim of unconsciousness. When I regained my senses I crawled out from a jumbled wreck consisting of mangled horses and a crushed stage and stood erect the only living victim of the desperate crime. I looked up and saw the gray walls of the canyon lose themselves in the sky, and then I staggered away with my brain in a whirl.

"That night—for night it was still—Nick Norway, Uncle Sam's detective, became Reynard, and not long after Red Jack had a new citizen. Thus began the career of Reynard of Red Jack. It started where Nicholas Norway's identity ended, and the man who followed Don Lopez so long was still in the shadow of the old trail."

Solid Sam dropped his eyes from the speaker's face and let them fall upon the paper on the table.

"Wait!" sent Reynard across the table in a whisper. "I want to take care of number one."

He left the room, going out like an ordinary person, but suddenly beyond the door he whirled to the right and threw out his hand.

The next instant a half-stifed cry cut the darkness and then Reynard came back to Sarcy dragging with him a man whom he held at the throat.

"Here is one of the secret catchers!" he laughed in response to the scout's stare of amazement. "I've run across them ever since I embarked in Uncle Sam's service. Fill the chair there, San Pablo Paul," and he pushed the white faced spy into the seat he had just left.

"For God's sake, gentlemen, have mercy!" whined the man. "I overheard nothing—I assure you I did not. I happened to be in the mine and saw your light."

Reynard broke in with a derisive laugh.

"Your eyes are uncommonly good to see through a door like that one," said he. "Besides, Diamond's weasel did not 'happen' here just at this time."

"Upon my living scul—"

"There! don't waste your precious breath in lies," resumed Reynard, as he took a lariat from the wall and approached the prisoner.

In a little while San Pablo Paul was bound in the chair.

The man protested till the voice of Reynard silenced him with a threat and then his teeth chattered from fear.

Five minutes later a man lashed to a chair was filling a dark place with expressions of mingled rage and despair.

"Oh, the villains!" he cried. "Why did I let Reynard catch me? I could have left before he came out, but I wanted to hear all, curse my curiosity! Reynard, eh? Don't I know now that he is the Lost Detective—Nicholas Norway himself, still on the old trail? What a discovery I had for Don Diamond when I was nabbed by the fellow's hand! Now I am I don't know where; but somewhere in Zeo's mine—left here to die by inches in a chair of death. A thousand curses on you, Reynard of Red Jack! When you have played your hand of vengeance, for that is what you are after, you will never come to release me. No! I perish where I am in the abyss of rayless death. Was I born for this? I wish I had never seen Don Diamond. I would

give my head if I had never become that gold-bug's slave!"

Meantime the office in the mine had become deserted.

Reynard and Sarcy had gone down into the camp and had parted company not far from Don Diamond's house.

"The game is fairly on now, major, and we will see who holds the winning hand," said the detective, who looked at the mountain mansion standing apart from its neighbors.

Suddenly the sounds of a horse approaching fell upon his ear.

Drawing back, he waited for the steed, and in a little while a man sprung from a saddle a few feet away.

"Big Faverell!" mentally ejaculated the ferret. "The fellow has been abroad and has come back to his master with his report."

He saw the stalwart figure of Don Diamond's right bower disappear in the house, and as the door closed he slipped forward and went up the steps.

As the door in Faverell's eagerness had been left ajar he was in the house.

"In the lion's den!" muttered Reynard, seeing two certain objects ahead—a staircase and a lighted transom.

He went up the former, his feet making no noise on the carpet, and in a minute he was leaning over the cedar bannister looking down into a room the most prominent figure in which was the burly six foot one of the Titan of Red Jack.

Reynard's eyes became riveted on this man and his companion, who occupied a chair at a table and who was watching Faverell intently while he emptied three glasses of liquor in succession.

Man and master had come together again!

"I'm back successful!" suddenly cried Faverell. "We can now turn on the vipers left uncrushed by Judge Powers's court. The secret isn't safe while they draw breath. Zeo boasted that, though we had caged her, an avenging Nemesis was at our heels."

Major Diamond bent eagerly forward.

"Did she say that, Faverell?" he cried.

"She said nothing less."

"Great God! whom did she mean?"

Reynard saw the Red Jack Hercules grin.

"I've guessed the riddle, major," said he. "Zeo's words have made something pretty clear. The devil took care of his own the night we took the stage in the mountains."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this—Reynard of Red Jack is Nicholas Norway, Uncle Sam's tireless shadow!" The change which came over Don Diamond's face is indescribable. A spasm of palsy seemed to shake him from head to foot.

"My name's a terror yet, I see, major," laughed the man on the stair. "Just wait till I play the merciless hand I hold!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE UNDERGROUND WIRE.

"ALIVE after all that was done?" exclaimed Major Diamond, his gaze fixed on Faverell. "Look here! I want you to tell me how a man can be carried over a canyon wall, bound in a stage at that as he was, and after falling hundreds of feet escape to plague me as of old."

"I can't answer some conundrums," replied the giant with an attempt at a smile. "I know that Uncle Sam's ferret is here."

Don Diamond's hand was stretched out on the table and Faverell saw it close till dark blue veins swelled in it like whipcords.

"I have but one command!" he cried springing up and pointing toward the door. "Go and finish the detective. When he is out of the way—when you can bring me proof that the cat o' nine lives has breathed the last one out, come back—not before!"

Faverell drew back from the excited man, and then wheeled toward the door.

"Don't play the court card again. It failed awhile ago," continued the major. "Packed juries go for nothing in Red Jack any more. I am ashamed of my friends. Faverell, you know what your reward will be. Go now, and do your duty."

In a second the giant of Red Jack was at the door, and his big hand was turning the knob, when the major's voice stayed him once more.

"What about the young spy?"

"I've put the boys on his trail."

"Did they take the short mountain cut?"

"They did."

"When do you expect a report?"

"Before noon to-morrow."

"Good! That is all."

Faverell came out into the hall, with the keen eyes of the Lost Detective upon him.

If he had looked up he might have seen the figure of his foe crouched on the stair, ready to spring down like a cat if he attempted to ascend, or to send a bullet after him.

Reynard looked down over the transom when Faverell had gone out.

He saw Don Diamond in his chair, white-faced and wild-eyed.

The detective's eyes seemed to get a fierce, triumphant light while he studied the picture.

"You've played a thousand games in your

time, major; but this is the deepest and coolest of them all," he murmured. "You knew that I was coming to Red Jack on the trail I found when looking for Don Lopez and his gold secret, and it was really your hand that stopped me in the mountain, and sent me over the canyon cliff with a thousand chances against me. It has cost a good deal to keep your secret—the lives of fifty soldiers, and some dark work in other quarters. Your right bower is off now on a mission of destruction. He is not to come back till he has effectually silenced the United States detective! A pretty plan it is, major. You are determined to remain King of Red Jack at all hazard. Ah! let me see if I can't bring some rose color back to your cheeks!"

The house was invested with a strange quiet, as if every living person under its roof was in deep slumber.

Reynard went down the steps to the last one. Turning quickly there, he stepped to Don Diamond's door and opened it slowly.

In another moment he stood beyond the threshold with a full blaze of light on his figure, and with the stareful look of the Dakota nabob fastened upon him!

Major Diamond's hand moved suddenly toward the edge of the table in his front, but a quick stride carried Reynard forward, and he was at the gold-bug's side as the hand pulled open a drawer in which lay a brace of silver-mounted six-shooters.

"We'll talk first—fight afterward if you insist," said the unmasked detective, and Don Diamond's hand fell away from the drawer, and he settled back into his chair, his look abating nothing in malignance.

"I know you, and yet you come here!" said he. "You are the man who has played a double hand under our very noses for the last four months."

"You don't mention any name, major."

"Why should I? A man ought to know himself."

A smile seemed to come involuntarily to the detective's lips, and while Don Diamond looked, it vanished and left the countenance unruffled as before.

"It was a wiping out with a vengeance," suddenly continued Reynard.

"What was?"

"The episode in Vulture Gulch. I went through it all by a miracle."

"Through it all? You?"

"Yes. I rode into the melee and crawled out. Captain Raymond would not listen, and went like a fool to his death with fifty brave men at his back. The secret of Nicholas Norway's ride had to be kept, eh, Major Diamond?"

There was no answer beyond the cold mad look of the man in the chair.

"Do you expect the reds to suffer for the massacre in the Gulch?" the detective went on.

"Are you going to keep on at this rate?" growled Diamond.

"Not if the subject is displeasing," retorted Reynard, the smile coming back. "I am here in the flesh—a living proof that a man can fall over a canyon cliff and escape to hunt down the person who issued the order for his destruction in order to keep a certain secret connected with a headless corpse in the sage brush of Southern Arizona. Do you want to see my hand, major?"

"I've seen it before."

"Not in Red Jack; possibly while I was watching Don Lopez for Uncle Sam. The Mexican's gold mines are not a myth, after all. You have put the secret to practical uses, for I've had the honor of inspecting the chain of mines from which you have extracted your millions. The Government no longer wants Don Lopez's cipher maps, nor the plan he was supposed to carry next his heart. I am on my own hook now, though it seems that Uncle Sam hasn't quite given up his missing detective. Major, is this very distasteful?"

"Go on," answered Diamond, through his set teeth, though he assumed a nonchalance he did not feel. "You are giving me some information which I could obtain from no other source."

The Red Jack Croesus glanced at the chair behind Reynard, but the detective did not follow the silent invitation.

"You would not pay Zeo her price for the Yellow Witch," continued the shadow.

Don Diamond's lips twitched.

"Are you in league with that woman?" he exclaimed.

"I am a league unto myself," was the quick reply. "Major, does Coral know?"

The man of Red Jack bent forward as the name was spoken, and threw up a hand.

"My daughter occupies the room overhead," said he, "and I would not have her hear any part of this conversation."

"I don't wonder."

Reynard lowered his voice, however, as he proceeded:

"I must talk of the girl. The time has come for that. She can be nothing to me as a detective more than a clew to the strange trail I ran across while prosecuting my search for Don Lopez and his secret. She has grown up beautiful. You saw in her, years ago, the grace

and loveliness which she has developed under your roof. Coral would shine anywhere, and it is a wonder that her mother never discovered—"

Reynard looked at the face which had suddenly become pale, with two intensely black eyes burning under the lofty brows.

"Go to the end!" hissed Major Diamond. "Say all you wish to say, hunter of men, and then listen to me."

"I am nearly done, Major Diamond," was the continuance. "I was about to say that it is strange that Coral's mother, seeing her almost every day for years, did not discover her identity."

"Then you insinuate that I am not Coral's father?"

"You her father?" smiled the detective.

"You doubt it?"

"Her father was found headless one day, and nobody knows this better than you!"

"This is infamous!"

The gold king of Dakota pushed back his chair, and springing up stood before Reynard before he could interpose a hand.

"Don't unnecessarily heat your blood, major," said the detective, coolly. "Let me remind you that you are absolute master here, that the men of Red Jack, with insignificant exceptions, are your slaves. I am here alone to tell you to your face that Uncle Sam's Lost Detective has found himself, that the man who followed Don Lopez and his secret to the bitter end stands before me now, and that the beautiful woman he has proclaimed his child and heir, hasn't a drop of his blood in her veins."

Major Diamond's eyes seemed to light up with a quick, triumphant gleam at Reynard's first declaration.

Why fear this man, who was single-handed, before him? His power over the bronze toughs of the Yellow Hills had not been lessened by the detective's bold, almost foolhardy throw.

He was still the Czar of Red Jack, with Faverell at his right hand and "Judge" Powers and his court at his back. Indeed, why should he not laugh at the detective's words, and take things with a triumphant coolness, as he could afford to do?

"You did not have to play a fool's hand," cried he, as thoughts of this kind seemed to give him nerves of iron. "You are right, Reynard, as I call you still. I am absolute master here. Go off and throw the cards you think you hold. I have, while standing here, sent an electric message to my minions, and even now you are in a death-trap. You have not seen everything connected with Don Diamond and his mines. You never discovered the underground telegraph which I can operate with my foot on the carpet. So you came to tell me that you are not Reynard, but Uncle Sam's Lost Detective? The news preceded you a few minutes. The death hand, the winning cards, belong to me! You had better have perished with the soldiers in the canyon!"

Himself once more, Don Diamond dropped into his chair again, and laughed like a man who thinks the game all his own.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ARMY DETECTIVES ONCE MORE.

"So I'm not to return till I've fixed him. That is the command. The Lost Detective has come to life, and unless we beat the cards of vengeance he holds, somebody who has expected to win all along may come out loser. I'll do my part, quick and sure. Then I'll go back for the wife I'm to have."

These words from the lips of Big Faverell of Red Jack were heard by no one though they were spoken aloud.

He had left Don Diamond's intent on carrying out the last command of his master and partner.

There was to be a bold death-stroke, and then all would be over.

"The boys will head Darrell off. I have no fears of that," thought he. "They have the better horses and have taken the short mountain cut. When Coral is Mrs. Faverell, she will rescue no one from underground dungeons."

Half an hour later the renowned "Judge" Powers and Faverell went down into the depths of Zeo's mine.

They unlocked the door of the luxurious "office" and entered.

Their eager hands ransacked the place, but in a gentlemanly way, and when they finished, the Red Jack Titan held a few papers in his hand.

"These don't tell much more than we already know," remarked Faverell to the "Judge," holding up the papers while he spoke. "They confirm the woman's identity, and may prove interesting reading for the major. Here, pasted to one of the leaves, is an extract from an old Southwest paper telling how a headless corpse was found in the sage brush, with the hands crossed on the breast and a little wooden cross in the cold grip. I wonder why Zeo kept this slip of paper thus?"

"Judge" Powers made no reply.

"In God's name, what was that?" suddenly cried Faverell, rushing to the door and listening there a moment.

"It sounded like a human voice, but—"

"It is a voice! There it goes again! Listen. Some wretch has fallen into one of the lower chambers."

"God help him then!" ejaculated the "Judge."

The two men stood at the entrance to the subterranean room and kept silence a few seconds longer.

"It is San Pablo Paul," suddenly observed Powers. "The voice has that fellow's whine. Let him go. He got the better of me the other night at the tables. We don't have to rescue the scamp."

"No, but we might look after him."

"With Don Diamond's last commands in our ears?" "Judge" Powers looked at Faverell. "Go to San Pablo's assistance if you like, for by the Eternal One! I don't lift a hand in his behalf."

Powers went back into the chamber and took Zeo's favorite chair.

He took a cigar from his pocket and lit it complacently.

"Affairs seem to be approaching a crisis," murmured he, a smile stealing over his face as the airy smoke soared gracefully to the dark-brown ceiling far overhead. "What am I to reap out of the game? In the first place a good deal of trouble if Uncle Sam gets at the truth and proceeds to take wholesale vengeance. I'm under a cloud now because my court failed to convict Reynard. Don Diamond says that he overlooks the failure, but I know better. I'm pretty well acquainted with the master of Red Jack. Faverell pretended to wonder why Zeo kept the newspaper slip so long. Once a year ago when I stole down here to see what progress Zeo was making with her bonanza, I found a paper clipping which, strange to say, referred to the same tragedy. The man killed was said to be Don Lopez, an eccentric Mexican, supposed to possess a secret concerning some hidden mines. Then I put another thing to this. When I went up to the major's one night I found a bit of paper fluttering over the top of one of his private drawers. Curiosity led me to draw it out, and to my astonishment I secured an old Santa Fe newspaper printed in Spanish. The first thing that met my eye was a paragraph marked in a peculiar manner. It, too, was an account of the discovery of the headless body in the chaparral. Queer! I have said nothing about this matter, but I have thought a good deal. I have been judge and jury for Don Diamond ever since he opened his mines here, and for what? I get ten thousand a year—money paid in gold at the end of every month—yet at the end of the year I owe him. He wants a new partner, and he takes Faverell in. He wants a husband for Coral and he goes to—Faverell. Always the man who has just left me!—always the Hercules of Red Jack! I think I know enough to demand something better than I receive now. Haven't I played puppet for the gold-bug of Dakota long enough to assert my rights? I don't want to be here when the army comes to avenge the massacre of Vulture Gulch. True, my hand was not there, but I know who did the work."

The judge's cigar had gone out during his soliloquy and he had quite forgotten the man who had gone to the rescue of the person crying out in the depths of darkness.

As he leaned toward the wall to strike another match he heard a sound which brought him to his feet.

"A cavalry trumpet, by my life!" cried the judge, and in a second he was listening at the door with the unstruck match in his hand.

The corridor stretching from Zeo's office led directly to the main shaft, and a noise like the clear and far-reaching notes of a cavalry bugle were pretty sure to penetrate to the place.

The Jeffreys of Red Jack soon learned that he had not misinterpreted the sound, for all at once it came down to him from the clear atmosphere outside in the ringing call of a bugle.

"Did you hear that?" cried a voice at his elbow, and the light coming out from the chamber showed him the face and figure of Big Faverell.

"I heard it," answered Powers. "What does it mean?"

"Some more accursed soldiers have come!" grated the Dakota Hercules.

"Where is San Pablo Paul?"

"Tied in a chair at the bottom of an old pit."

"Who put him there?"

"The man your court was afraid to hang!"

"Reynard?"

"Reynard and his lawyer."

"Don't you intend to rescue San Pablo?"

"With soldiers—our worst enemies—in Red Jack?" exclaimed Faverell. "Let the man who won your dust help himself. Come! I think we'll be needed where the blue-coats are."

"Judge" Powers was not loth to quit the Yellow Witch.

He could not imagine what adverse fate had peopled Red Jack once more with soldiers, and while he followed Faverell he cursed the army with all the bitterness ever indulged in by Tough Talbot.

The two men reached the Square to find it occupied. The men who had lately departed under the command of the young captain who

had followed Raymond to Red Jack had returned.

The return meant something.

The detachment, thirty strong—old campaigners under a boyish leader—had come back instead of riding to Fort Meade with the terrible report of the massacre in the Gulch.

"Thar they ar'—back ag'in!" growled a man who stole up behind Faverell while he was contemplating the moving figures on the Plaza. "It means something desperate."

"Desperate, eh?"

"Yes, Captain Faverell. The young captain who went off with his head full of vengeance ag'in' the Injuns don't say nothin' about 'em now. An' the men—they stick close together an' don't visit the ranches as they did before."

"But they've just come, Dick?"

"So they hev, but we kin see that they've changed in their ideas. I'll stake my head that you can't get one to say that the Injuns are guilty."

Faverell said nothing for a moment.

"How many are there all told?" he asked.

"Thirty-one."

"Where's the captain?"

"I don't see him now."

At that moment a figure walking from the middle of the Square toward the El Dorado at one side happened to cross the Titan's line of vision.

"You know that man well enough, eh?" exclaimed his companion.

"Yes!"

The man thus singled out was Solid Sam the scout, and Faverell's eyes became riveted upon him as he approached, and watched him with a darkening glare till his figure vanished.

Sarcy had already communicated with the soldiers! The man who had beaten "Judge" Powers's court and who had rescued Don Diamond's foe was preparing for another play.

"Captain?" suddenly asked the man at Faverell's side.

"Well?"

"Don't you think there ought to be another wipin'-out to hold our own?"

Big Faverell looked into the face of the man whose lips trembled with the last words and caught the fire that blazed up in the speaker's eyes.

"Are you ready for work of that sort if we order it?" he ventured.

"Try us!" was the quick response. "I guess all of us hate blue-coats as Talbot hated 'em, and we've got to keep the Vulture Gulch secret at all hazard. Pass the word along, cap'n—issue the unwritten mandate—and thar'll be thirty-one empty saddles more in Uncle Sam's mounted legion."

Faverell with a look of promise moved on, following in the footsteps of Solid Sam who had just left the soldiers.

Suddenly he came to a halt and then drew back.

The door of a cabin had opened, and he was almost face to face with the very man he was looking for. But Sarcy the scout was not alone.

The portal, still open, contained the face of a man who evidently had just been in conference with the scout.

"Back, and with the soldiers!" cried Faverell, staring at the new face. "He must have taken the other road—the one no one thought he would take. He's found the soldiers; he told what he knows, which is a good deal. He has changed the captain's mind. Darrell wants to get even. He burns to step between me and the heiress of the Red Jack bonanzas. I know the boy."

Fortunately Faverell had halted in time to prevent being seen, and when Sarcy and the young man in the shanty had separated, he whirled and went straight to his own cabin.

He dashed open the door, and reached one corner with a single bound.

Stooping there, he found near the floor in one of the logs a metallic button, which he grasped with eagerness. The following moment he was pushing it in and out, and the noises thus produced resembled the clicks of a telegraph sounder.

After a while Faverell stopped and placed one ear near the button.

A lengthy silence ensued, then a dozen clicks at short intervals reached his ears.

"What's that? Played one of his hands, eh? Great God!" and the Hercules of Red Jack bounded up and rushed out like a madman.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CORAL'S NERVE.

SOMETHING unusual had brought the soldiers back, and fate had decreed that they should arrive at a crisis in the history of Red Jack.

The young captain, who had been hoodwinked by the well-spun stories of Don Diamond and his minions was willing to believe that the dastardly outrage at Vulture Gulch had been perpetrated by the Indians, but there were men in his command who did not share his opinion.

These soldiers, after consultation, had agreed to keep their suspicions to themselves till the arrival of the company at Fort Meade when they

intended to throw off all restraint and express their belief to the commandant.

But affairs were to take another and sudden turn.

The command was halted in the mountain by a man who appeared suddenly in the mountain trail, and in a moment young Darrell was pouring a startling story into the captain's ear.

The detachment drew up in close order for council, and there was but one desire expressed. The murder of their comrades seemed to send a burning flame through the soldiers' veins. They clamored to be led back to Red Jack; they were ready to drag Don Diamond from his house and shoot him to death in the center of the Plaza. The youthful captain now saw how he had been deceived and when some one suggested that they might be riding into an ambush as disastrous as the one which had settled the fate of Raymond and his men, he gave orders for the retrograde march.

Darrell who in riding back with the cavalrymen had escaped the masked desperadoes waiting for him in the mountains managed to reach his cabin home unmolested and Faverell on hunt of Solid Sam had been the first to discover him.

The troops had come back without any show of resentment. They rode quietly into the Square and bivouacked as before, but the captain had cautioned them to be on their guard.

As for Ford Faverell, when he saw Darrell back in Red Jack, and realized that the scheme against him had failed, he went, as we have seen, to his own cabin and ticked a message in great haste.

The reply had startled him. Hardly waiting for it to be finished, he rushed from the shanty, and a second later fell headlong into "Judge" Powers's cabin.

"Ha! some of these soldiers can't keep a secret," laughed the judge at sight of Faverell. "They've given away the game."

Big Faverell stood in the middle of the room his eyes swimming in excitement.

"What is the game?" he asked huskily.

"A coup within an hour," was the response. "They are going to arrest certain parties."

Faverell seemed to draw back.

"Am I one?"

"You are."

"And Don Diamond?"

"The major and his Honor," laughed the judge, striking his breast. "The young captain has heard something. There is a traitor among us."

"Not so much traitor as spy. You don't know who came back with the soldiers?"

"No."

"Darrell."

Powers gave utterance to an ejaculation of surprise.

"Where is the young scamp?" he cried. "Fetch him before my court! Let my jury have a chance at him."

"This isn't a case for your jury," observed Faverell with a smile. "We can pass on Darrell's crime without a shadow of law and that is just what we will do. But first of all the preparation for the battle. We are now confronted by more than a lot of army detectives. We have Reynard in his true character against us, then, we find Solid Sam on the opposite side, and lastly we must meet the friends—the mine slaves—of Zeo the Enchantress. You see it is no one-sided battle, judge. It is a death-grapple for existence. The crisis of Red Jack's life has come. We must stand together."

"Judge" Powers looked closely at the speaker a moment before he replied.

"This man is working for himself," thought he. "Don Diamond has passed me every time to favor Faverell. Why put my head into a noose to stand by him? I've got enough to answer for besides doing this. I am for 'Judge' Powers first and last. I guess I know where my head is the safest."

Faverell saw no signs of such reasoning for he looked over his shoulder at the "judge" from the door, and said significantly and solemnly, "Remember!" and was gone.

Meantime Don Diamond had remained in his house, and most of the time in the famous audience room where the fate of more than one human being had been determined with the cool cruelty of a devil.

Half a dozen times he had manipulated a metallic button in the floor, but as he bent toward the carpet and listened he heard no response.

"Where is he?" he cried driving the button into the board with his heel. "I told my visitor that I had telegraphed his doom beyond the walls of this house, yet I have heard nothing which confirms the boast. They have not failed me? No! I have Faverell at my call. I have all the rest; they are as much my slaves to-night as when they took the oath which made them mine. I wonder if the accursed camp is asleep?"

He dashed from the room and went to the front door.

As he threw it open the clear notes of a cavalry bugle crossed the space between him and the mountains, and he listened like a man in a maze.

"Can the troops have come back?" grated he.

"Must I deal again with a lot of uniformed bloodhounds? Well, they will find Don Diamond keen and merciless."

He went back to the room with rapid strides. As he crossed the threshold he heard a foot-step behind him, and in a second he found the eyes of Coral fastened upon him.

"The soldiers have come back," said the girl. "Their bugle has just announced them. What does it mean?"

He regarded her searchingly a few seconds, like a person who attempts to read one's thoughts by the eye.

"Coral, you want them to come back, don't you?" he asked.

"I?" exclaimed the young girl, starting.

"I would think so, after the hand you have played. You liberated the young spy from the dungeon; you sent him away to betray me and my mines, and it may be your hand that called the army bloodhounds back to give us trouble."

Coral lost color before the mad look and cold eyes of the man who spoke thus to her.

"What is Darrell to you, girl?" he went on, closing in on her with a suddenness which she could not resent. "You thought enough of him to lasso him from the dungeon."

"I did."

"He is more than friend, one would think."

Coral's color changed to a tell-tale flush and Don Diamond grasped her wrist as if he feared that she was about to seek safety in flight.

"Tell me now, for this is the time," he went on. "Do you love Darrell?"

She drew back the length of his arm, but straightened proudly there.

"I love Darrell!" she answered, courageously giving him look for look.

Don Diamond dropped her hand and pushed her away.

"Poor girl!" laughed he. "If you knew all about Darrell—if you could hear the story of his birth—"

"The narrative would not lessen my love!" cried she. "You laugh at what you have often called his obscurity, and yet you give me to a man whose past is as black as the night which has hidden some of his deeds. You make this man your partner, your confidant, and, without consulting me, you give me to Faverell, the vulture of Arizona. What if I were to tell you that my hand is not yours to bestow?"

Major Diamond's face grew dark.

"Not mine, eh?" he laughed, leaning toward her. "What pretty insinuation is this?"

"Read it as you wish," was the answer. "You are the interpreter, not I!"

The autocrat of the gold-camp stepped back and gazed at the girl whose courage, assumed so suddenly, had rendered her more beautiful than ever.

"Not mine to give away, eh?" he suddenly cried. "I accept the challenge. Walk into the room, Coral. I want to see you a moment in sacred privacy."

At the end of another second Coral stood face to face with the Nabob of Red Jack in the room so well known to the men of the camp.

Don Diamond waved her to a chair which she took, and then seized the cord which dangled from the ceiling.

The summons was answered by the servant who had taken Sejo's place.

Go out and find "Judge" Powers and Captain Faverell," exclaimed Don Diamond at sight of the man's face. "As you go along ask whether there are soldiers in Red Jack, and how many. But don't come back without the judge and the captain."

Then, as the factotum's face disappeared, the king of the mines turned toward spell-bound Coral and smiled.

"What were you saying about not being mine to dispose of?" he asked. "You have just heard my command. You ought to be able to interpret it."

There was a slight start on Coral's part.

"There! keep your seat, child," continued he. "I am only going to teach you that I am master here by making you the wife of the Vulture of Arizona!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SERVED TOO WELL.

THE heiress of Red Jack broke from Don Diamond's touch, and in an instant was on her feet. Her bosom rose and fell like tumultuous waves, her brilliant eyes looked more brilliant than ever.

The king of the Dakota mines stared at her and wondered what she would say.

"This is the game, is it?" cried Coral. "You are paying me back for taking Darrell from the underground trap."

"I am only disciplining you, girl," was his reply. "You need a master, and I assure you that you'll find one with a mailed hand in Captain Faverell, my partner. Go back to the chair. The door is locked and will not be opened till the judge and the captain come."

He turned to the table without another word, and appeared to forget at once that Coral was in the room. She watched him with a half contemptuous, half-defiant smile, now with her

hot blood crimsoning her temples, now with her whole face deathly white, and her hands were tightly shut all the time.

Did she wonder what was going on beyond the doors of the mansion?

The notes of the bugle had announced the return of the soldiers. Something startling had brought them back.

Don Diamond had cursed them for their return. He was the natural enemy of the army, though there had been a time when he was a soldier himself.

Twenty minutes passed away.

Coral had gone back to the chair, and the master of Red Jack was still writing, as if utterly oblivious of her presence.

He could be exasperating when he chose to.

All at once there came into the room sounds of footsteps from the corridor.

Don Diamond crossed the carpet and unlocked the door.

The messenger appeared.

"I found Captain Faverell, but 'Judge' Powers has fled," reported the man.

"Fled?" echoed the Nabob of Red Jack. "What has happened?"

Already the servant had taken a piece of paper from his pocket.

"From Faverell," said he, extending it.

Don Diamond took the message, and glanced at the hasty scrawl which zigzagged across it like the crawl of a serpent.

"Come in and keep Miss Coral company," he resumed, holding the door open for the servant, who was tall and muscular, with cold gray eyes and large dark hands.

"Coral, child, I am called out," he said, as he ushered the man in. "Mardo will keep you company, and, if called on, will entertain you with some stories of his checkered career."

Coral left her chair with a gesture of remonstrance, but in a second the door closed with a click and she was left alone with her guard.

"What has gone wrong outside?" she demanded, facing the man as he came forward.

"Do you think anything has?"

"I do."

"Red Jack will come out on top, no difference what has occurred."

"It is man and man again?"

"It looks that way."

"They have turned the tables on the league of Red Jack."

Mardo showed his teeth in a grin.

"Not completely turned them, miss, said he. "In the first place, the man who stands fully unmasked is no match for Faverell and the boys. The soldiers may show their teeth, but Red Jack is too strong for them."

"Then the truth of the massacre is known to the army?"

"The blue-coats claim to believe that no Indian had a hand in the affair."

"You know that, Mardo?"

The man's look dropped before Coral's searching gaze.

"What had taken place up to the time of your leaving the Square?" she asked.

"Judge Powers had departed."

"Nothing more?"

"Faverell had issued secret orders for the men to surround the soldiers on the Plaza."

"Merciful Father! Is there to be another massacre? The secret of the Lost Detective is out. All the bloodshed that may be indulged in cannot long stem the tide of justice."

"They're going to try it, I think."

Coral looked at the guard and then at the door. Don Diamond had gone out.

"I must not remain here," she cried, leaning toward Mardo.

"I cannot disobey my master," was the reply.

"You know him only as Don Diamond the Mine King of Dakota."

"That is enough."

"Don't you ever inquire into the antecedents of those whom you serve?"

"I never do."

"Will you listen if I tell you something about Major Diamond's past?"

"I'd rather not."

"Do you think I am the mine king's child?"

"I have never given the matter a thought."

Coral seemed to lose courage. Whatever she had done with Sejio, the former servant, this man Mardo was incorruptible. She burned to pass beyond the room. Exciting events were occurring in the heart of Red Jack; she knew it.

The crisis in her life had been reached, and the career of Diamond, the gold-bug, the man of many names and many crimes, was to take a new turn.

For several moments she kept her chair, studying the impassive face of the man left to watch her, then she bent forward toward Mardo.

"You will not listen to me," in low tones.

"You are bent on serving Major Diamond, of Red Jack, no matter who he is. You don't care whether his hands are blood-stained or as white as a babe's. You know who ordered the massacre in Vulture Gulch. Perhaps you rode in the ranks of the butchers? Captain Mardo, you show your guilt in your eyes!"

He made no sign that he heard her.

Her hand passed over the edge of the table and touched the knob of the nabob's private

drawer. Then the drawer silently slid open and her hand clasped the revolver that lay therein.

Mardo saw the act, and the weapon was drawn ere he quite comprehended her purpose; then she was his master!

"The key is in your pocket, Captain Mardo," said she, bringing the handsome six-shooter up to a level. "This is a time when I have much at stake. Open the door and stand back for me to step out."

Mardo seemed to fix his stalwart figure the more firmly in the chair, and his look was one of cool resolution.

"Don't play fool, Mardo," continued Coral. "It is not bravery to serve a man at the expense of one's life."

He laughed.

"You would not shoot me, miss?"

"No, I would not like to, Mardo, but the key in your pocket must open your door."

"To let you out to play some foolish hand among a lot of desperate men?"

"It matters not what sort of hand I would play."

"I think it matters a good deal."

"Then, you intend to keep the key?"

"I generally obey my master!"

At once came the report of a pistol, and man and chair fell backward in a heap.

Coral, with a blanched face, stood erect beside the table, a smoking revolver in her right hand, and was staring at the body lying across the broken chair, when something small and white lay on the floor near Mardo's hand, which had been jerked from his pocket as he tumbled backward.

In a moment she held the coveted key in her hand.

Still clinging to the revolver, she crossed the room and unbarred her way to the streets of Red Jack.

The door was locked behind her; Mardo was left in the fort he had failed to hold.

The Dakota heiress was soon beyond the house. Her blood seemed to throb with pulsations of fire. The night-air, which came down from the mountains cool and refreshing, failed to calm her excitement.

She ran swiftly toward the Square.

Why was everything so quiet? Had the soldiers taken their departure?

At that moment the shrill whinny of a horse broke the stillness. At the same time a cabin door opened on Coral's right, and she saw a man come out, with a Winchester thrown across his arm.

"I guess it's time to join the rest," said this man aloud. "The army men know nothing of the game. When the two captains come out of the private room of the El Dorado and give the signal, we'll duplicate the Vulture Gulch episode."

The man vanished like a puff of smoke.

"In the private room, are they?" repeated Coral. "Where is Reynard of Red Jack?"

She turned toward the famous ranch of the Yellow Hills capital, and soon saw its open door and lighted windows.

There were no signs of a gathering storm about them, but Red Jack's heiress knew that the very silence was deception itself.

She passed the El Dorado, and kept on to Reynard's shanty. The chances for finding the Lost Detective there were decidedly against her.

As she opened the door she spoke its owner's best-known name, and waited for an answer.

None came, and silence was all that rewarded her.

"Try the door first," said a voice at Coral's elbow. "If he isn't in we'll swoop down on the other place."

She could not hide, for with the words which thrilled her a footstep came forward and she drew back to the wall of the cabin as the giant figure of a man rose before her.

"Hello! here's a prize!" cried the tough, sighting Coral, but before he could touch her she darted forward with a loud cry, and ran straight toward the Plaza. The next second she was in the camp of the silently sentenced troops.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NABOB AND NEMESIS.

CORAL found the soldiers on the alert.

She had no sooner reached the little camp on the Square than she found herself face to face with the young captain, to whom, in a few brief sentences, she related her adventures.

"We know all," said the captain. "We have not returned to Red Jack blindfolded. The career of the Secret Gold League, of which I am sorry to say your father—"

"Don Diamond," corrected the girl.

"As it suits you, miss," was the response. "The streets of the camp are now patrolled by armed men. We are in what looks like a death-trap—a second ambush as it were. You may be able to see that my men are not unprepared."

Coral saw the figures by which she was surrounded.

Now and then she saw a carbine or revolver-barrel where the starlight touched it, and everywhere she noticed how eager the soldiers were for the battle evidently at hand.

"Where is Reynard?" she ventured.

"Playing his final hand."

"And Solid Sam?"

"He is after the Jeffreys of Dakota. Judge Powers needs to be tried by a court as merciless as the famous tribunals of his own creation. Sarcy is eager to catch the rascal and turn him over to the Government, whose laws he has so repeatedly outraged. Well, Nolan?"

The soldier who had just come up leaned toward the captain and spoke in lowered tones.

"Miss, I shall have to request you to retire," said the young officer of the troop. "It is suspected that Reynard has failed."

"In what?"

"In seizing Don Diamond after his own plan, and cooling down, with him in his possession, the tigers of Red Jack."

"I can go," replied Coral. "There are several ways of escape open to me; but, to you, sir?"

"Oh, we intend to fight the vultures right here," responded the captain.

Hardly had he made this reply when the open door of the El Dorado, then in full view, shut with a bang, and a portal at the end of the bar-room swung open, disclosing the figures of Don Diamond and Faverell as they came forward.

"Are you ready?" asked the nabob, catching the eye of a man, who started from the counter.

"We are ready."

"Where are the army hounds?"

"On the Plaza."

"And Reynard?"

"He is in Captain Chip's hands, by this time?"

Don Diamond drew a long breath. He was about to issue an order as famous and merciless as others he had issued before.

He glanced toward the ceiling, and rested his eye on a face that looked down at him, framed in a hole two feet square!

If he could have looked back of this face he would have seen a hand resting on a little bar, the moving of which would open a window in the gable of the El Dorado, and at the same time flood the Square with a powerful light, which would reveal the figure of every man and horse to the armed men who had surrounded them.

"In a moment," said Don Diamond to the eager face in the opening. "Go to your place, Burt," he continued, to the fellow who had just reported everything in readiness. "We'll wait two minutes; then the light will flash, and we will expect work!"

The lieutenant touched the rim of his hat and went out; but the dark face in the ceiling-trap kept its place.

During this time there stood at the rear door of the bar-room, but on the outside, a figure that seemed to have grown into a statue.

Burt, the executor of Diamond's orders, nearly touched it as he passed to his mission.

The following moment the nabob's lieutenant was seized from behind and so adroitly tripped that he was on the ground before he could utter a cry or lift a hand in self-defense.

"It is done; now for the others!" was spoken at the window; "now for the coup!"

"But the man in the loft? He may spring the light the moment we enter and the troops will receive the death volley from every quarter."

"There lies the danger. Ah! Faverell is going out the front door. That leaves Diamond alone. You can't master the Ajax of Red Jack, Darrell. He is too much for you. I'll go forward. The face of the man in charge of the calcium light can be seen at the trap. As I cover Diamond will you make a target of those watchful eyes above him?"

"I will!"

Darrell pushed back his hat and followed Reynard to the threshold, for Reynard, the Lost Detective, it indeed was—the tireless, dauntless, ever-faithful Nick Norway.

A second passed—a second of preparation for the coolest work rough Red Jack had ever witnessed; then the door was thrown open and Reynard sprang into the room.

Diamond turned, and at sight of his hunter sent a hand toward his hip.

"The drop for Nicholas Norway!" cried the detective bringing up his revolver. "Face to face in our true skin at last, major!"

A shot rung out behind the United States detective, and a sharp cry was followed by the prompt disappearance of a head from the trap in the ceiling! Then young Darrell advanced while Reynard held the Croesus at the muzzle of his revolver.

"It is a fool's play for all!" suddenly laughed Diamond. "The army scullions will be corpses under their horses' feet in less than two minutes. The last desperate card avails nothing, Nicholas Norway. I walk to the door and give the signal—"

"You will fall against the door dead if you try the experiment, major."

Diamond with a smile of derision leaned against the bar.

"Hands in front and close together!" commanded Reynard.

The man of the Yellow Hills answered with a defiant look.

"My motto as a detective has ever been

"Alive or dead!" was the quick warning. "It matters but little to me in which capacity you finish your career as nabob and tough. Dead, you will save Uncle Sam some court expenses, nothing more. Once more, Major Diamond—hands out!"

The cornered mine king sullenly but not without a look toward the front door held out his hands and Darrell with a short slip-noose in his grasp stepped forward.

"Tied by you?" cried the Boss of Red Jack, shrinking back as he met the youth's triumphant gaze. "A thousand years in Tartarus first!"

The look of scorn, with the words, cut like a knife, and instantly Darrell leaped behind Reynard's revolver and Diamond, and threw himself with his whole weight upon the mine king. The major was crushed against the counter; there was a short, sharp struggle, and a fierce cry from the man whose hands had never before felt the draw of a cord announced that all was over.

Barely had this been effected, when the front door opened and half a dozen faces appeared in the light.

"The pistol-shot did it. Look! the Square is a blaze of light!" cried Darrell.

Reynard had already seen this, but at the same time he had covered the wondering group at the door.

"Forward!" came the order from without, and then the stern command: "Shoot down all who offer resistance!" followed the advance of the cavalrymen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. HEAD FOR HEAD.

A FEW minutes after the grand *coup*, Big Faverell sprang up the steps of Don Diamond's house. Twisting the knob with a desperado's eagerness, he went in and proceeded to the private room.

It was tenantless.

Going to the table he jerked the green cord dangling over it.

Sejo's successor put in an appearance with a handkerchief well-soaked with blood bound about his head. Mardo seemed to grind his teeth when he saw Faverell in the room.

"Where is Coral?" asked the Dakota Hercules.

"Gone to Tartarus, I hope!" was the answer. "She left me a cracked temple as a souvenir of our brief acquaintance. What's happened on the outside?"

"A general balancing of accounts," was the answer. "Do you mean to say that the girl isn't in the house?"

"I do. If she had stayed she would have been throttled!"

"Good-night, and good-by!"

The wounded servant drew back to let Faverell pass, and stared at him with eyes swimming in astonishment.

The big ruffian proceeded at once to Don Diamond's stables and took out and mounted his best horse. In a little while he was flying down the trail. Now and then he would turn in his saddle and listen.

"By Jove! I never saw anything like it," he said to himself for want of some one else to talk to. "If Nicholas Norway sticks to all his trails as he has stuck to this one, he is the champion bloodhound of the world. When I saw him falling down over the canyon wall, in the stage, I laughed—'good-by, Uncle Sam's shadow!' and when Reynard came quietly to Red Jack I never dreamed that the detective had assumed another skin."

On, on rode Faverell. He followed the main trail a long distance.

At length he turned aside and rode into a snug little valley nestling quietly beneath the stars.

"I'll peep in on Captain Double Fist and see how he is getting along with his guest," thought Ford.

Across the valley to a wilder country he went. He rode into a rock-walled basin and was about to dismount, when a voice held him to the saddle.

"The fortune which has never deserted me brings us together, Captain Faverell!" he heard. "It is said—known, indeed—that Don Lopez was shot from his horse and then beheaded. I am more than Zeo the Enchantress. I have been called the Woman with the Knife though I never killed my husband, as slander's tongue has accused me. Have you come down from Red Jack to see how Captain Double Fist and I are getting on? The captain is well, but he is going to the governor. Arizona is ready to pay the five-thousand for the maimed bandit. Hands up, Captain Faverell! you have served Don Diamond long enough. The fate which has brought you to me makes me the avenger of more than one crime. I avenge the death of Don Lopez, the robbery of his gold secret, the abduction of my child, now the Coral of Red Jack—in short, Faverell, if I spared you, the curse of heaven would alight upon my head!"

The light that prevailed was strong enough to let the big sport see the speaker and her leveled Winchester. He drew his broad shoulders up

as the cabin rung with a loud report; then his stalwart figure tottered in the saddle, the reins slipped from straightening fingers, and the horse looked down at a man on the ground!

In Red Jack the soldiers held possession. Night had given place to day, and quiet reigned after the *coup*.

Major Diamond was once more a tenant of his mansion, but the day of his rule had passed, for the grip of the Lost Detective had fastened on him.

It still seemed like a dream to the Man of Red Jack. The sudden transition from power to captivity had well-nigh turned his head.

The day grew on apace, and, as he watched and seemingly waited, his pale face grew paler and his lips met firmly.

"Has Faverell deserted me?" he exclaimed. "Does he throw away the oath he took when we united our fortunes? I won't believe it! The hand and brain of the best man in Dakota have not lost their cunning. He will come!"

Yes, Faverell was coming back to his master, for, while Don Diamond talked thus to himself, a horse, reeking with foam, was swinging over the trail a few miles beyond Red Jack.

It was ten o'clock, and the avenging soldiers were thinking of their departure on the morrow, when the nabob heard a key turn in the door.

"Something for you, sir!" announced the cavalryman who did guard duty in the hall, and Diamond took a covered basket from his hand.

Carrying the basket to the table, he saw a paper pinned to the cloth.

"Ha! what is this?" he exclaimed. "'The compliments of Zeo and Justice,' eh?"

He clutched the cloth and threw it back; then, with a wild cry, he stared at something in the light like a man suddenly rendered insane.

In the basket, nestling among crimson cloths, and ghastly in the hues of death, lay the grinning head of his right bower.

The Hercules of Red Jack had returned.

"Head for head, major!" said a voice, at sound of which the man wheeled, but saw no one. Certainly he had not heard a voice from the past! It was too human for that.

He sprang to the window and threw back the curtain. The shutters were closed, but beyond the bars he saw two glittering eyes set in a woman's face.

The vision vanished, and the man of many names and crimes knew that Zeo had brought the head of Faverell home!

Three months have passed since the long delayed victory of the lost detective in Red Jack.

The mountains are still redolent with the odors of flowers, and the skies hold the blue which the brush of summer gave them.

A young couple are riding horseback into the capital of the Yellow Hills. The town has scores of strange faces for them, but there are nods and smiles on every side.

Men touch hats to the young man and doff them to the girlish face above one of the saddles.

"New Red Jack, Coral," observed the youth. "Justice dealt leniently with the wolves of the mines. Uncle Sam is always too merciful; but, perhaps, in this instance, he was content to confirm you in your title to the mines once your father's—Don Lopez's—secret which cost Nicholas Norway the best years of his life, and the lives of fifty heroes of the saddle. Don Diamond's men have vacated their false claims. The nabob himself, strangled within the walls of Fort Meade, was preceded to a felon's grave by Tough Talbot and Faverell. Yes, Coral, perhaps, as you insist, blood enough has been shed in retaliation. Reynard of Red Jack is satisfied and we ought to be."

"I am satisfied, Darrell. My much wronged and avenging mother, who sunk quietly into her grave after the last act in the drama of gold and passion played to the bitter end by Don Diamond and his satellites, is at rest. Let us build a new Red Jack here, and let us rechristen it Reynard City, in memory of the man who kept the trail through thick and thin till he lifted the curtain of mystery and avenged the cruel past."

Reader, it has been done.

"Judge" Powers, the Dakota Jeffreys, managed to elude Solid Sam; but, not long afterward, a court as merciless as his own, and as well "packed," too, swung him from a border noose under a midnight sky.

Reynard, or Nicholas Norway, the Lost Detective, remains on the scene of his great victory, and the palace-car instead of the stage carries travelers to-day over the memorable country between Cut-throat Canyon and Red Jack, now Reynard City.

It was the mountain nabob's theft of Coral which was the crime discovered by the detective, during his hunt for Don Lopez's secret, but not until he took up his abode in Red Jack to watch Major Diamond and his pards did he suspect the relationship which really existed between her and Zeo.

Captain Double Fist, caught by his guest, went down into Arizona "under guard," and for the good of mankind at large, never came back.

THE END.

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